



THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

ORIGINAL NARRATIVES OF THE JAMES BOYS

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 11.

Price, Five Cents.

JESSE JAMES AMONG THE MOONSHINERS

OR
THE TRAIN ROBBERS' TRAIL IN KENTUCKY



BY W.B. LAWSON

A VOLLEY OF SHOTS FROM THE POSSE SPLASHED AROUND THE BOAT, BUT THE OUTLAWS MERELY UTTERED A YELL OF DERISION.



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NEW YORK, July 20, 1901.

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Jesse James Among the Moonshiners;

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THE TRAIN ROBBER'S TRAIL IN KENTUCKY.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER I.

THE KENTUCKY SHOOTING MATCH.

"Hands up, thar!"

It was in the western portion of Kentucky that these words were spoken one dull November afternoon, years ago.

Significant words, truly.

They smacked of the far West, with its gold trains, its road agents, and wild scenes.

The man upon whose ears they fell, and was undoubtedly intended as the person to be addressed, showed little concern, however much he may have felt.

Coming to a pause, he leisurely turned his head and glanced in the quarter from whence the strange order had come.

"Lige, show up, you coon. I know yer voice," he calmly said.

At the same time, had one been close to him, it could have been noticed that he was not without some little anxiety.

These were troublous times in certain parts of Kentucky.

The recent Civil War has created deadly animosities among the people of the border States—Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia and Missouri.

This was why Jed Harkins, the ex-sharpshooter, grasped his rifle a little more firmly as he watched the bushes.

He had, as he believed, recognized the voice of the unseen speaker, but it might not be Lige Bigelow, and what seemed to be a joke would prove a very sorry one should the other fire.

To his relief a man parted the bushes, and, with a laugh, stepped into view.

It was the party he had called by name.

Lige likewise carried a rifle, one of the old, deadlly, squirrel-shooting species, made famous by the Boone and Kenton settlers almost a hundred years before this time.

"On the way to the shoot, I reckon, Jed?" said the newcomer, as he reached the other.

"Yes; and you the same, Lige?"

"Well, I thought I'd take it in. A turkey ain't to be sneezed at on Thanksgiving, and I promised the ole woman to fetch it home."

Lige spoke unconcernedly.

The ex-sharpshooter and he had long been rivals with the rifle, and were known as the two best shots in Western Kentucky.

Jed sniffed contemptuously as he glanced at the man who thus calmly declared his intention of carrying off the prize.

"One'd think you held a mortgage on that turkey, to hear ye, Lige. Reckon thar's others as may have a word to put in. Allow ole Betsy Ann"—patting his long rifle affectionately—"to have her say, if ye please."

Lige was in a good humor.

He had been diligently practicing of late, with the intention of defeating his old rival, and the scores he had made satisfied him that he had a long chance to succeed.

So he bantered the sharpshooter as they strode along in the direction of the crossroads tavern, where the shoot was to take place, and so worked upon the other that various side wagers were made regarding the issue at stake.

Who would win?

It would be an event of no little importance, since quite a sum of money besides the turkey must fall to the lot of the lucky man, there being an entry fee of a dollar a head.

Presently they caught up with others, who were also on their way to the scene of the match.

They came from side roads, and struck along the pike—some on foot, others mounted.

The regular shooting match on Thanksgiving was about the greatest event known at this end of Kentucky during the year, with perhaps the excitement of election, when a fight generally occurred, ending in a homicide.

As they drew near the crossroads, a dozen persons were seen ahead and behind.

Presently the two rival crack shots drew up at the tavern.

Quite an assemblage had arrived before them, and they were greeted with much good-natured badinage on their arrival.

Nevertheless, it might have been noticed that as a general thing the other men paid Lige and Jed a sort of silent homage.

These men were recognized as the crack shots of the whole region, and although a number present were anxious to test their skill against them, it was pretty generally conceded that one of the two would surely carry off the prize.

The master of ceremonies was a small man with flowing beard, called "colonel."

He was known as a great sportsman, and this Thanksgiving match always fell to his share to manage.

Colonel Jack's voice was now heard, announcing that the tournament was about to begin, and that those who wished to compete must step forward, deposit their

money, and receive in return a number to be pinned to the coat.

This latter was in lieu of taking the name, and besides being more expeditious, gave the men the order of their firing.

It was an idea of the colonel's, and of which he seemed to be very proud.

Quite a little crowd of shooters pressed forward to be registered, and when he saw the number the colonel smiled, for the success of the match was already assured.

There would soon be fun for the spectators.

Lige and Jack hung back.

They were in no hurry to enter.

It was their intention to come in last and astonish the early contestants with their skill.

Finally they stepped up together.

The colonel handed them a badge each.

Lige scowled when he saw that he was to shoot first, being number seventeen, while Jed had the following number, but confident in his power, he soon smiled again.

The benefit of his recent practice must presently manifest itself.

"Are you alone—the polls close in five minutes—a dollar a head for entry," announced the colonel, in a loud voice.

Two men were standing near by.

One seemed urging the other to enter the lists, which the latter appeared unwilling to do.

Perhaps he realized how hopeless was his task when competing with such veterans as these sharpshooters.

The words of his companion or some sudden notion must have influenced him at last, for, just as the colonel was about to declare the lists closed, he stepped modestly forward, handed in his money, and received a tag that marked him as number nineteen.

All was now in readiness for the shoot.

The colonel mounted a barrel to announce the simple rules governing the match.

Each competitor was allowed three shots, as one was considered too much of a chance.

If by chance there should be a tie, it must be shot off.

This being all so simple, was readily understood by the competitors.

The shooting began.

There were a number of first-class marksmen present, and some of the scores brought out cheers from the audience.

Several had clipped the bull's-eye, but as yet none had entered the small circle in its center.

Thus the competition went on.

It came to the turn of Lige Bigelow.

Smiling, he drew a bead, and following the report came the signal that his bullet had pierced the center of the target.

Jed stepped up.

He had his lips shut tightly, but otherwise gave no signs of any nervousness.

It was an old story with Jed.

An old sharpshooter like him had made a business of it so long that he seemed hardly to take aim, then he pulled the trigger.

Another center!

The crowd expressed its approval in cheers.

This was something like shooting, and ere the trophy passed into the hands of the victor, they were apt to be decidedly entertained.

Little attention was paid to the stranger who had entered as nineteen.

He fired, and behold, another center.

When this fact was telegraphed, a number looked at him with renewed interest.

Perhaps here was a man who would give Lige and Jed a pull before going under—a dark horse suddenly loomed up above the horizon.

The two old-time rivals had taken but one shot each, and hence the stranger followed suit.

Colonel Jack, puffed out with importance, announced that there was a tie.

A new target would be put up in order to meet the emergency—one that might be reckoned as worthy of the skill of three competitors.

This announcement caused cheers to arise from those present; the excitement had reached fever-height, and bets were indulged in, but no one seemed to believe the stranger would win.

CHAPTER II.

"MY NAME IS JESSE JAMES."

This time a smaller target was placed, and the competition grew more earnest.

Each in turn scored a center.

Wilder grew the excitement.

Shooting such as this had not been seen for many a day.

The two old-time rivals fairly glared at each other in sullen fury; each was determined to do his best to win. Lige had gained much through practice, but Jed seemed to be on his mettle, and the result was mighty uncertain.

Strange that as yet neither of them seemed to pay any attention to the stranger.

He was beneath their notice.

The real contest lay between the rivals. This unknown upstart had been enabled to keep up with them thus far more through luck than anything else, but he must speedily drop out of the race, as the pace would grow swifter.

As the second target had been done away with, it was announced that each competitor could choose one of his own, beginning with Lige.

He bent a piece of willow wand, so that it would move with the wind, while sticking up in the ground.

A small piece of the bark had been stripped from its center, leaving a white spot an inch long.

When this wand waved in the breeze, a more difficult target could not be imagined.

Lige had the advantage.

He knew it.

For months he had been practicing at such a swaying mark, until it became an old story with him.

He knew his rival's weakness.

Jed was a remarkable shot at any stationary object, but when it came to one that was moving, he could not depend on so thoroughly.

Two other wands were prepared in exactly the same way, and thrust into the ground alongside the first one.

All was ready.

Lige cut his target in two at the first shot, and when the pieces were brought in it was found that his bullet had struck the white spot.

Hats were thrown up.

Cheers rent the air.

Lige became the pet of the multitude at once.

Again the colonel called "time!"

Silence reigned.

Every eye was on Jed, who nervously thrust his rifle forward in his impulsive way.

This time he took aim, something no one had ever known him to do before.

Evidently Jed realized what a task he had before him.

Then came the shot.

Hurrah! the willow twig was divided, and part of it flew into the air.

But stay—Lige had quick eyes, and already he made note of a certain fact.

"Bring the pieces here," he called out.

This being done, it was discovered that Jed had severed the swaying wand an inch or so beyond the peeled portion, and therefore his shot must be accounted a failure.

The old sharpshooter fell back in chagrin when this fact was announced, growling at the want of justice in making him shoot at a mark selected by his rival, without giving him a chance to return the compliment.

"Lige wins!" shouted the crowd.

"I am proud to declare that our honored——"

Just there the colonel came to a stop, for a heavy hand had alighted on his shoulder.

"Colonel, I beg your pardon, but it seems to me I am entitled to a shot in this game."

Ah! the stranger!

He had been utterly forgotten in the excitement of the moment, which went to show what little chance they thought he had.

The colonel was nothing if not courteous.

"I beg your pardon, sir. Certainly you are entitled to a shot. Yonder lies your mark. Take your chance," and under his breath he added: "And much good will it do you."

The stranger assumed an easy attitude.

His manner was entirely free from affectation and nervousness. Any one could see that he had long been familiar with firearms.

There was still some laughing among those who had wagered on Lige.

The stranger turned his head.

"Judge, would you mind asking the gentlemen to keep quiet and give me a fair show."

"Certainly, my dear sir. Gentlemen, I beg of you to remain silent. This party has a shot at the target."

Again the noise ceased.

Fair play was a jewel among these men.

Even a stranger in their midst was entitled to a show at their hands.

The successful marksman, Lige, turned and contemplated his new rival closely.

It was the first time he had paid any particular attention to the other.

A shade of uneasiness crossed his face as he looked

under the slouch hat and noted the determined countenance of the stranger.

"Heavens! how like that man!" he muttered.

Lige held his breath while the other aimed.

He would have gladly made some sound to have disconcerted the other, and as if by accident trod on the tail of a little yellow cur that persisted in sneaking in among the legs of the shooters.

The dog gave an unearthly howl.

It was just a second too late, for the report of the stranger's rifle had already rung out.

Dark glances were cast at Lige by a few fair-minded men present.

Being a bully by nature he did not mind it, but looked eagerly toward the willow wands.

One of these had been divided.

Lige swore under his breath when his keen vision told him it had been cut in twain exactly at the white mark.

This fact was verified when the remnants of the wand were brought in.

Again the excitement increased.

Evidently the dark horse was looming up, and Lige Bigelow had run across a foeman who was likely to prove worthy of his steel.

The doughty colonel became interested.

He even condescended to glance at the strange marksman a second time.

This glance showed him a rather tall man, built with sinews of steel, and a quick nervous movement that proclaimed him lightning on the shoot.

"It is your turn to propose a target," the presiding officer declared, to the unknown who had entered as number nineteen.

"I know of nothing better than the old game of splitting a bullet," he answered.

This was hailed with satisfaction by the crowd.

Once, it had been a familiar part of a shoot, but of late years had died out entirely.

Preparations were quickly made.

A smooth piece of board was nailed to a tree, and into it a knife was thrust in such a way that the edge of the blade stood outward.

It was the object of the marksman to so strike the blade as to divide the bullet, half entering the board on either side of the knife.

As it was the stranger's target, he fired first and accomplished his object.

Smiling, Lige stepped up and repeated the feat.

This pleased the crowd.

They did not care if the thing was kept up all day; it afforded them sport.

As the two rivals had thus far come out even, another target was created.

This was driving a nail.

A certain number of paces were measured off, and then in turn they shot, each scoring a brilliant success.

What next?

The colonel had never been placed in such a predicament before.

He scratched his head as he endeavored to consider new methods for trying the relative skill of the two sharpshooters.

Just then Lige touched the other on the arm.

He pointed upward.

An osprey was sailing over far above their heads, and doubtless heading for the swamps along the distant river bottom.

"Fire with me!" he said.

Both rifles were raised.

Only one was discharged—that of Lige.

The fish-hawk doubled up in its flight, came down almost like a stone.

While it was rushing through the air, the stranger sent in his shot.

They brought the bird in.

Loud exclamations arose when the plain marks of two bullets were discovered.

This was shooting with a vengeance.

The like of it had certainly never been seen before in all that section.

It looked as though Lige had caught a Tartar.

The stranger had already beaten him, and yet the match was not won, as this heat had been an off-hand one not down on the bill.

It had one effect.

Lige was rattled!

Once get a man in that condition, and he is very apt to lose his grip.

The colonel suggested an idea.

It was neither new or brilliant, but had always been practical at the matches where the competitors were few in number.

This was nothing more nor less than burying the turkey to be shot for, all but his head and neck, and at a certain distance away, using the moving head for a target.

Lots were cast for first shot.

Lige won.

The chances seemed in his favor, but his star was not in the ascendant.

He took his place.

Whispering died away until not a sound could be heard save the sighing of the November wind among the leafless trees.

All eyes were bent either on the marksman or his strange target.

The imprisoned turkey seemed to feel his peril, for he kept his head going constantly in eccentric circles.

Then came the report.

Lige had fired.

Did success greet him?

No shout of approval followed, and Bigelow shrank back from the railing, as if conscious that he was about to be defeated.

It came the stranger's turn.

He threw the weapon to his shoulder, with everything to win and nothing to lose, since Lige had already made a miss of it.

Without wasting much time he fired, and the turkey's head flew into the air as if propelled from some peculiar catapult.

"Well done!" shouted the crowd.

Cheer followed cheer, coming from the partisans of Jed Harkins, who were almost wild with delight at seeing the victory snatched from Lige.

The stranger smiled calmly as he let another cartridge

fall from the magazine into the chamber of his repeating rifle.

Evidently he was an old campaigner.

A victory like this did not excite him.

There were certain hard lines in his face that told of a wild life in the past—he had supped many a time on danger, and met deadly peril hand to hand.

Nor was his countenance frank and engaging.

A close observer would have found the mark stamped it as somewhat cruel.

At any rate, he was a man who knew full well how to take care of himself—the dare-devil was characteristic of him.

He approached the colonel.

Lige had just been whispering something to the judge of the ceremonies, who was now observing the stranger with redoubled interest.

"Have I won, Colonel Jack?" asked the stranger.

"Fairly and squarely, sir."

"The turkey is mine?" pointing to the decapitated bird, just then being carried in.

"Yes, sir."

"Allow me to donate it?"

"With pleasure."

"You have a widow in the town named Gray?"

"A good woman, but with a hard row to hoe, a number of children to support, and poor health."

"Her husband was one Archie Gray, I believe."

"Yes."

"Killed in the war?"

"Exactly, sir."

"I knew him well—rode beside him on many a wild foray, and was at his side when a bullet struck him."

Those who heard the stranger say this grew more deeply interested, for Archie Gray had been a rough rider, first under Morgan and then with the guerrilla chief of Missouri.

"How about the purse?" inquired the winner.

The colonel held it up in his hand.

"It is yours, sir, on one condition."

"Indeed! what is that?"

"One of the rules of the tournament is that the victor, if unknown, shall give his name."

The stranger started.

He cast a glance toward Lige Bigelow, as though mentally deciding that it was to him he owed it all.

"Is this positively necessary?"

"It is our rule."

The stranger looked around him, a sneer upon his lip, as he said in a loud voice:

"Then I submit to your rules, Colonel Jack. My name is Jesse James, and I hail from the old State of Missouri."

"I thought so," muttered a man who stood in the crowd, and his eyes sparkled; "my chase is ended—I have found my game!"

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN-HUNT BEGUN.

The mention of this name created considerable excitement.

There was hardly a man present who had not heard of

it, for the outlaw of Missouri had been kicking up a row in his State, and a heavy reward was on his head.

So feared was the Missouri desperado that even when he stood there, one man apparently against two score, a hand was raised against him, at least for the minute.

Mechanically, the judge handed him over the purse, which the victor stowed away in his pocket.

"Come, Frank, let's be going," said the man against whom the whole country was arrayed.

He held his repeating rifle in the hollow of his arm, ready for instant use.

The man who had exclaimed "I thought so," looked at the two men, as they walked away backward, made a step or two toward them, shook his head, and halted, muttering:

"I reckon not. If all this crowd are afraid of those desperadoes, why should I openly attempt their capture, and risk death? I can have patience, and all will come to me."

The two James boys beat a retreat.

No one molested them.

Afterward the men wondered why they did not attempt to arrest the outlaws, who were worth a small fortune, dead or alive, but each man declared it was not his funeral.

Of course, the talk was all about the surprise that had come to them.

Where were these men staying?

It was soon ascertained that under assumed names, they had come to this section to recuperate after being severely wounded.

They had declared their wounds had been received in a feud, but now it could readily be understood that it had been in an encounter with the officers put on their trail by the express company they had plundered.

It was with old Jed they had stopped, and he seemed as much surprised as any of the others over their identity, as revealed by the successful marksman, in order to secure his prize.

Presently the quiet stranger approached him.

He had been making inquiries.

"You are Jed Harkins?" he asked.

The old man nodded.

He was feeling very glum, for he had lost the match, and, although his rival had failed to win it, this only partially reconciled him to his loss.

Then, again, the declaration of the man he had known as John Roberts had stunned him.

"Those men have been staying with you for some time?" pursued the other.

"Well, what of it?" came the surly reply.

"A good deal. They have been known under other names. No one dreams of suspecting that you knew who they were. I am a seeker after the truth. My name is Bill Sikes, and I am a detective sent out by the authorities to arrest the James boys."

The old man looked him over from head to foot.

"The devil you say! Why, they'd eat you alive, them dare-devils, I reckon."

"Wait and see," was the quiet response. "I think they'll find Bill Sikes the toughest old crow they ever sat down to."

By degrees the detective got out of him all he knew, which did not amount to a great deal, but gave Bill Sikes all the proof he wanted that his men had been hiding all this while in this quiet Kentucky region.

Jed and the detective had hardly been talking five minutes when several others came up; among them Lige Bigelow.

The latter held out his hand to his old rival.

"Jed, let's bury the hatchet, and jine forces to hunt them Missouri outlaws. Thar's a pretty pile offered for the two—enough to make us rich. What d'ye say—are ye in?"

Jed saw no other way than to acquiesce, for his reputation was at stake.

"We'll take ye in, Lige," he said, gravely.

"Who's we?" with a glance at the stranger.

"This here's a detective, who's been looking up Mr. Jesse James an' his brother."

Soon a dozen had enrolled themselves.

Leaving the crossroads tavern, the party of self-constituted vigilants made off in the direction of old Jed's house.

The ex-sharps shooter lived in a commodious cabin, and had quite a little farm around him, on which he raised tobacco and corn.

When they reached this spot questions were at once put to the old woman.

Had the two strangers been there?

She had seen nothing of them.

The men had a number of things in the cabin which they had apparently valued quite highly, and it seemed probable that they would be apt to return in order to claim them.

As the day was almost past, and the shadows of the coming night near at hand, it was decided to lie in wait, forming a sort of cordon around the cabin, with a code of signals whereby the movements of all could be regulated.

Before an hour had passed after the falling of darkness, Jed touched his companion's arm.

"My ears are keener than yourn, and they tell me some one is comin' up the walk," he whispered.

"Good!" returned the detective.

He drew back the hammer of his repeating rifle, and half raised the weapon so as to be ready.

It was sure death, apparently, for Jesse James to approach the cabin in this path, and yet some one was certainly coming.

CHAPTER IV.

OUTWITTED.

The sounds grew clearer, and there could be no question now but what some person was advancing along the walk.

The detective, knowing well the desperate character of the man he had come so far to arrest or kill, prepared to fire.

Old Jed stayed him.

"Hold on," he said, in a whisper, "don't shoot. It's a woman arter all."

The figure had advanced into the light cast from the window, and Sikes could see this now for himself.

It was a woman.

She appeared to be old and decrepit, for she advanced with the use of a cane, and walked in the peculiar jerky way rheumatics have.

Upon her head she wore a great sunbonnet that effectually hid her face.

An old shawl covered her bent form over the homely dress, and one hand clutched at this to prevent the wind from robbing her of it, while the other held the stout cane with which she did her walking.

The detective looked at the remarkable figure with some surprise.

"Who in the devil is that?" he asked.

"The Widow Gray," replied Jed.

"Ah! I heard him donate the turkey to her. Does she come often to your house?"

"Not formerly, but since my boarders came she seems to hev been more frequent."

"We know why. She knew who they were."

By this time the singular-looking creature had passed into the house.

A short interval passed.

No sounds were heard from the house.

When ten minutes or so had gone the door opened again and some one came out.

The widow.

She carried a small bundle now, which old Jed eyed with great suspicion, while she hobbled down the path toward them.

"I'd like ter know mighty well what she is got in tha package," he muttered, as though he feared lest the widow might be carrying off all his worldly possessions.

The detective guessed his intention and held him in again with a check rein.

"Don't do it, Jed—too dangerous. Let her go—you know where to find her."

Later on he was ready to have some one kick him for this advice.

Who can see through everything?

The bent figure hobbled past them, whining and muttering as she went, as was the habit of the rheumatic widow of the dead raider.

Soon she disappeared from view.

Again silence.

A short time elapsed.

Then the light in the window was lowered and raised three times.

"Thunder!" ejaculated Jed.

"What's wrong now?"

"Why, that's a signal from the old woman, one we used to have years back."

"What does it mean?"

"She wants to see me."

"But how does she know you are around, since you haven't been in the house?"

At this Jed started.

"Don't know, unless she guesses it. Anyhow, that's something gone wrong, and she wants ter see me. Danger in the air, too, else she wouldn't use the old signal."

Springing to his feet, gun in hand, Jed quickly covered the dozen yards that lay between their hiding place and the door of the cabin.

The detective, watching, saw him enter.

Then he listened and kept watch, but neither sound nor sight that was suspicious greeted him.

Perhaps five minutes passed.

Then the cabin door opened, and old Jed's gaunt figure was seen outlined in silhouette against the brightness within the room.

"Captain!"

The fellow was calling loud enough to alarm the whole neighborhood.

What could he mean?

Had he taken leave of his senses?

The detective was too choked with indignation to answer at first, even had he so intended; so he remained silent.

Jed called again.

"Captain, I want ye. Come here. Somethin's happened, by gosh!"

That changed the complexion of things.

If anything had happened he ought to know about it, that was sure.

With a groan at the strange way things were going, the detective arose to his feet and advanced toward the house.

Jed greeted him.

"This way, captain. Come right in."

"But suppose they should come?"

"No danger."

"Eh?"

"He's been here already."

"What?"

"Jesse James has been here."

"But your woman said not."

"That was an hour back."

"Well?"

"Since then he's called and taken his traps."

"Thunder! the old widow——"

"Was Jesse James, sure enough!"

The detective gritted his teeth.

"I swar, the imitation was splendid, and he deserves to get off."

"Off! He hasn't escaped yet."

Jed looked up quickly.

"Then you mean to foller him?"

"Well, it isn't in Bill Sikes to let a thing stop so easy.

If you and the men are with me, well and good; otherwise, I go alone."

The ex-sharpshooter looked his admiration for the man who would dare hunt, single-handed, two such desperadoes as the James boys.

"Oh! we're with ye, captain. Once we make up our minds to a thing, you bet it goes."

"Bring your men up, then."

"All of 'em?"

"Yes, every man; I want them to understand the case fully before we go farther. Perhaps they may have some suggestion to offer."

Jed proceeded to call the men, and in a few moments they were on hand.

Sikes began to ask questions.

In this way he learned something that was likely to redound to his advantage.

One of the men stated that several days before he chanced to be at the lone whisky still of an old hermit

moonshiner named Derrick, up in the mountains, when he saw the two strangers approaching.

Derrick went out to meet them, and greeted them as old friends.

They talked earnestly for a while and then left.

As they were going he caught the parting words:

"It may come sooner than we think, Derrick."

"Sooner or later, I am ready; I do not forget what you did for me once, years ago."

These words seemed full of significance to the detective when he heard them.

He was quick to decide a thing.

"You can take us to this old hermit's place?" he asked the man.

The latter nodded.

"On one condition, sir."

"Name it."

"You are an officer of the law?"

"That is so."

"This old man, like many others in the wild mountain districts o' Kentucky an' Tennessee, breaks the law. He is no outlaw, and leads a quiet, orderly life, but he is bound to make his moonshine whisky, and pay no tax on it."

"Exactly."

"You have hunted such men, I reckon."

"My lines have been in other places," returned the detective, and it was well he could say so, for among those around him there were a number who would have hated him on the spot had they learned he was a revenue officer.

"Then you'll swear not to betray him, or use your knowledge agin' him?" pursued the man, who really had an interest in the still of the old hermit, which accounted for his deep interest in the matter.

Bill Sikes raised his head solemnly.

"I promise never to reveal the existence of the hermit's still, or to use my knowledge of his hiding place in any way that could bring him harm. Will that satisfy you?"

"Entirely."

"Then lead on to the place."

"Wait till Jed hyar gets a lantern."

The sharpshooter was only a minute or so in procuring this, and thus equipped they set out for the den of the mountain hermit, where it was believed the James boys had fled.

CHAPTER V.

THE HERMITAGE STILL.

The darkness under the trees was intense, and Sikes soon discovered why they had need of a lantern.

It would have been almost impossible to have made progress along this route otherwise.

The detective had marked his man.

He who carried the lantern was the one who had given the information respecting the fact of the hermit being an old friend of the man whom they now hunted so vigorously.

His happening to be at the still was, of course, all a fable, for he had an interest in it.

Sikes kept at his side.

Not that he distrusted the man, for the other had volunteered to guide them, there being nothing compulsory about it.

In the first place, he received the benefit of the light, and this was no small matter, considering the rough nature of the trail.

Then, again, it gave him a chance to interview the man, and this was what he wanted.

"Jordan's a rough road to travel," he remarked, as one of the men behind stumbled and fell, muttering to himself as he arose.

The other chuckled.

"We might have taken an easier one."

"How is that?"

"This trail is shorter."

"Then there are two?"

"Yes."

"And those we hunt——"

"Have gone the other way."

"This path is shorter?"

"Yes."

"Is there any chance that we may reach the place ahead of them?"

"I can't say about that; much depends on the way they make time; but my idee in takin' this route was to avoid running agin' 'em on the way, and to let us use a lantern."

"Good. You have a long head, friend."

They lapsed into silence for a few minutes, during which progress was made, Indian file, along a very narrow trail.

Finally the nature of the ground allowed the detective to once more come up beside the guide, and he began asking guarded questions again, with the idea of becoming posted in respect to the situation ahead, in order to feel somewhat at home there when the time came for action.

Thus they went on.

There was some satisfaction in the thought that all the while they were drawing nearer the place where those they sought might be found.

The trail already led upward, proving that the hermit's hiding place, like most of the moonshiner dens, was an eyrie far up the hills.

The other route led up the gully.

It was a regular road.

That which they followed could only be called a trail, and was known but to a few of those who were deepest in the secret of the distillery.

All were so busily engaged in climbing that it was next to impossible to exchange words.

At the head was the guide, bearing the lantern.

After quite a little siege the party reached a sort of plateau, where they could rest and recover their breath for a minute.

This rock was far up the mountain side.

It stood out boldly.

In the daytime one could see a long distance over the valley from this lookout.

A pile of brush occupied a place on it, and the detective knew this was meant for a signal fire, to blaze up in case of trouble at the still, and bring friends of the hermit to his assistance.

They stood upon the flat rock to recover their breath. Bill Sikes, standing near the man who was serving as a guide, heard him give a sudden exclamation of surprise.

"What is it?" he asked, believing, of course, that the fact must bear upon their case.

"Do you see yonder light?"

The man was pointing, and, following in the direction of his arm as well as he could, Sikes saw to what he referred.

"Yes, I strike it," he replied.

"What do you make it out?"

"I should say a fire."

"How far away?"

"Perhaps two miles."

"It's near five."

"You don't say!"

"That fire is on a rock above the road, at the entrance to the valley."

"A signal?"

"Exactly. It is intended for the hermit."

"What does it mean?"

"That danger menaces. Enemies are in the valley—the still is in peril."

While thus speaking the guide looked at Sikes in rather a queer way.

This struck the detective home.

"See here, friend, you suspect me!"

"Well, you are a detective," bluntly.

"But not a revenue officer. I give you my word of honor I know nothing of any contemplated raid, nor have I any connection with the officers who are engineering it."

Somehow his manner, as much as his words, seemed to influence the guide.

"I believe you, Bill Sikes. Thar is my hand on it. But danger is nigh, an' it complicates matters, ye see, to have these officers coming down on us while we are engaged on other business."

"I understand."

"We have no more time to lose. Let us move forward and find old Derrick."

The others had seen the signal fire by this time, and understood its meaning.

They had a common interest in the secret still of the old hermit, for from it came the moonshine mountain dew which they imbibed.

Hence, none of them were willing that disaster should come upon the place.

Again the guide led the way.

He no longer needed the lantern.

The trail was open now, leading from the table rock to the den itself.

As Sikes supposed, a cave in the mountain served as a hiding place. This would be found the case in two instances out of three, and many ingenious plans were resorted to in order to hide the location from the keen eyes ever on the lookout for such places. Sometimes the pipe was run up into a hollow tree, so that the smoke would escape among the branches, or along a cleft in the rocks to a spot inaccessible.

The lantern being extinguished, the little party advanced after their guide.

It was a strange situation.

Here they were creeping toward the still, with the intention of surprising the men they supposed were with Derrick, and who would probably make a desperate fight; while at the same time a party of revenue officers had entered the valley with the intention of capturing the hermit moonshiner, and confiscating his property.

"Not a whisper now; we are near the place," announced their guide.

All became silent.

They moved forward, and entered between two walls of stone, where the darkness was intense; but there was no danger of slipping, and when one had once passed between these jaws he could not go astray very well.

A gleam of light ahead!

Creeping forward, they drew near the spot where the light escaped.

An old cabin, which had been built many years before to shield refugees in war times, was made to do service as a distillery.

It was lodged among the rocks in a way that made its discovery, save by accident, almost beyond possibility, for a man would hardly enter the dark and forbidding passage leading to the hut, unless warned beforehand with regard to what he would find there.

It was a window through which the light escaped—minus a sash.

When the guide and Bill Sikes reached it they both peered into the place.

It was a queer sight.

There was the still, the fire burning, several barrels around, an old lamp or two trying to dispel the darkness, and all the paraphernalia that might be expected in such a place.

One man only was in sight.

Bill Sikes grunted his disgust.

This was the hermit moonshiner.

He seemed a quaint character, gaunt in figure, with a grizzled beard and long hair, as gray as a badger.

Bill Sikes hardly knew what to make of the situation, and touched his companion's arm.

The guide bent his head.

"Have we arrived before them?"

"Hardly. They had plenty of time to reach hyar."

"Then they haven't come."

"That don't signify."

"You see for yourself."

"Wait. I've an idee old Derrick must have hidden 'em away."

The man's words put new hope into the mind of the detective, ever alert to seize upon anything that gave promise of success.

CHAPTER VI.

TRACKED TO HIS DEN.

As they stood there, the old hermit poked his head out of the window and demanded:

"Who's thar?"

"Me—Abe Skinner," replied the guide.

"Sounds like you've got an army along."

"Some of the boys."

They entered the stillhouse.

Old Derrick nodded to each, in turn, as he recognized friends among them.

When he came to the detective, he looked at him sharply, as though some sudden suspicion took shape in his mind.

"A friend of mine, uncle; I'll guarantee his good faith," said Skinner, hastily.

The hermit muttered something, as though he might be only half convinced; but he did not attempt to argue the case.

"Quite a surprise party," he said, grimly.

Evidently he suspected the nature of their errand, although he gave no hint of such a fact. The sharp eyes of Abe Skinner told him it was so.

"You wonder why we are here, uncle?"

"Yes."

"Not to buy corn-juice, but to bring warning."

"Of what?"

"Danger is nigh."

The old man shifted his weight from one foot to the other and looked a little nervous.

"What d'ye mean by that?"

"Uncle, the signal fire burns at Bear's Head Cut."

At this the hermit looked alarmed—his thin face took on an expression almost of terror.

"The beacon afire—then, by the holy smoke, the wolves must be coming."

"I reckon they are, uncle, and we are here to help you defend the place or hide the stuff, as you may decide."

"I must see the fire myself before I believe it," muttered the moonshiner.

He had been expecting the thing so long that, when it came, he was hardly in a condition to believe it, especially as he had an idea there was something else in the wind.

"Come with me—boys, stay hyar."

The detective took a notion to go along, but he found some trouble in keeping up, for these two men knew the way so well that they made remarkable time.

All managed to reach the flat rock at about the same time.

The hermit immediately cast his eyes about in the direction where he had for many nights been looking for the signal fire.

There it was, burning brightly.

There could be no mistake.

He uttered an exclamation of awe at sight of it, as though almost overpowered.

"Abe."

"Well?"

"Will you swear to one thing?"

"What is it, uncle?"

"Did you have a hand in lighting that blaze?" pointing with his long arm in the direction where the far-away fire glowed.

The detective guessed the motive prompting this question, and it echoed a suspicion that had already found lodgment in his own mind.

Perhaps Abe had sent a man to kindle the fire in order to cause consternation in the mind of the old hermit moonshiner.

Under the circumstances he awaited the reply of the guide with considerable interest.

"I have had nothing to do with it; the fire burns be-

cause there is danger. I believe Government officers are about to make a raid in this region. You know we have heard of it for some time back, uncle."

Old Derrick showed great excitement.

These gaunt people are generally of a nervous temperament, but, when the time comes for action, they get there all the same.

This man, old as he was, proved equal to the occasion.

"Back to the cabin!" he cried.

They made a rush in that direction, and such was their haste that twice Bill Sikes stumbled and fell, though he did not seriously injure himself on either occasion.

Reaching the cabin, they found the others awaiting their coming.

"Take hold, boys. We'll leave an empty cage when the wolves come. Cheerily, now, and the work will soon be done."

It was Abe who spoke.

The men understood exactly what he meant, having been forewarned.

Spurred on by the example of their leader, the men set to work with a will, transporting the parts of the portable still to the recesses in the rocks not far away—places pointed out to them by the old hermit himself.

Lanterns were used, of course, for the darkness was too great to admit of any movement without some such illumination.

"Watch the old man; I've an idee he means to get away and give us the slip," the guide managed to whisper to Sikes.

This chanced to be just what the detective had been hinking himself.

He knew what a sly old fellow a man of Derrick's build was apt to be.

All the while he had kept his eye on him, not meaning to be left in the lurch.

Their suspicions were verified.

The old mountaineer hovered around until about the last of his chattels had been secreted.

Then, without even waiting to thank the men who had come to his relief, he, like the Arab, "folded his tent and silently stole away."

The two men saw him go.

A lantern he carried was a guide to their feet, and they set about following him at once.

The rising wind fortunately prevented any little noise they made from being heard, and thus they were enabled to keep a certain distance behind the mountaineer.

On this same wind there suddenly came borne to their ears the sounds of shouts and shots.

These came from across the valley.

The lank moonshiner stopped to listen, and they could hear him muttering to himself.

Evidently he was more than ever alarmed by this evidence of war.

Abe found a chance to whisper to his companion an explanation of the matter.

"I reckon the officers have tackled Sandy Blair's still over yonder, and the boys are trying to hold out, but it ain't no use; it's all over."

Silence had, indeed, descended upon the scene once more—the shouts and shots were but a fading memory of the past.

Old Derrick had once again picked up the trail, and was hurrying along.

It kept the two men busy following him, and only for the friendly breeze sougning in the leafless branches of the trees near by, they could never have accomplished it without betraying their presence to the men they followed.

He was leading them into the wildest portion of the mountains—it was evident that his secret den must be in an almost inaccessible region.

Still it could not be far from the still, for he had not been given a great while to show his guests there and return.

It was strange to Sikes that, while the old man had never even shown his partner this secret den, he was now willing to share with others.

What sort of service had the James boys done him or his in the past?

Their journey soon ended.

The secret den lay before them.

Its presence would hardly have been suspected, for it was entirely hidden from view.

Luckily they had followed closely upon the heels of the one man who knew where it lay, and success crowned their efforts.

Old Derrick had been tracked at last!

CHAPTER VII.

PLAYING FOR A LIFE.

To reach the moonshiner's den required some show of reckless daring.

It lay over the edge of a cliff in the rocks that stretched down, Heaven alone knew how far.

A stout rope was secured to a tree, and trailed over the edge of this abyss, concealed by vines.

They saw Derrick fasten his lantern to his girdle, and swing over the edge fearlessly.

Craning their necks, they watched him descend the rope some thirty feet.

Then he landed on a shelf of rocks, and immediately vanished from view, entering some unseen hole.

"Thunder!" ejaculated Abe.

"Kind of risky business, eh?"

"I don't believe them fellows went down."

"Why not? They're dare-devils from away back. Perhaps there may be another entrance, but we don't know of it, and, if we want to find our men, we must go down that rope."

Abe gasped a little.

He was used to meeting a man on his own ground, however, and would not back down.

"I'm in it if you are, pard," he said, grimly.

"Count on me there. Come, we'll find the end of the rope."

Having noticed the spot where the old mountaineer had begun his descent, they had no trouble in discovering what they sought.

The bold detective prepared to descend.

"Let me go first," said Abe.

He hardly meant it, but it seemed as though he ought to make some such remark.

"No, it is my part," decided Bill Sikes.

He swung boldly over the edge, but not before he had examined the rope with his fingers and made sure that it was well fastened.

Life was precious to even a man of his character, accustomed to taking it in his own hand.

He slid down slowly, as it was not his desire to miss the ledge and drop down from the end of the rope into the unknown depths.

What if the rope should break?

Such a thing was possible, of course, although he did not expect it, as the moonshiner had not hesitated to trust his weight upon it, and this he would not have done had there been any doubt as to the capacity or reliability of the article.

Still there was a chance.

Well, if it happened, the detective would never know what ailed him.

Such a thing did not happen, fortunately for the man dangling there.

He began to whirl around a little, but, by using his feet against the face of the rock, put a stop to this.

The ledge at last, thank goodness!

Bill Sikes, accustomed as he was to peril, heaved a sigh of relief when his feet came in contact with the platform.

So far all was well.

When he had gained a secure footing, he gave the rope a double shake, as a signal to Abe that all was well, and that it was time for the other to begin his descent.

This he was not loath to do, since the detective had passed over the dangerous ground in safety.

Sikes could hear him descending.

He kept hold of the rope, so that Abe might not pass by and go to his death.

When he finally grasped hold of the other, Abe gave a low exclamation, for his nerves were, naturally, a little unstrung.

"Is that you, Sikes?"

"Yes. This is where you land."

They stood on the ledge.

Around them all was inky darkness.

Only above could the gray sky be seen. It had appeared dark before, but, in comparison with their present surroundings, the overcast heavens were not so gloomy after all.

"Which way, captain?" asked Abe.

His services as a guide were no longer in requisition, hence he fell back into the position of follower, the bolder spirit assuming the lead, as was perfectly natural.

He went, apparently, into the rock.

"There must be an opening."

"We will investigate."

This they at once did, and with the best of results, for it was found that there was a cleft just beside them, and undoubtedly the moonshiner had entered at that point.

To advance into this inky darkness without a light was not to be dreamed of.

Abe had a lantern, having been shrewd enough to secure one at the cabin, he suspecting that they might want to use it.

This now came in handy.

A match was struck, and then the candle in the lantern touched off.

At any rate, no matter what danger they ran, they would not be falling into holes.

Their peril would wholly consist of the danger of discovery by human foes.

Steadily they advanced.

The passage was a freak of nature, and would probably lead them to a chamber.

Would they find those they sought there?

Both men hoped so.

At the same time, they knew what this would mean for them, since the men they hunted were worse than tigers to trail. Indeed, most people would sooner attack a royal Bengal tiger in his native jungle than Jesse James among the mountains of Missouri.

"Hide the light, and let us look ahead."

The detective had an idea that they must be near the end of their trail, and he meant to make sure of it before going too far.

When Abe had covered the lantern with his coat, they could see ahead, for although darkness rested in their immediate vicinity, beyond lay a light that gave them considerable satisfaction.

It meant that their work was drawing near an end—at least, so far as finding the den of the old mountaineer was concerned.

Abe blew out the lantern.

They had no further use for it, at least just then, though in the future it might once more come in handy.

Creeping forward, they finally reached a point from whence they could see what was desired.

"Here they are," whispered Sikes.

Sure enough, the James boys were in sight.

They sat in the chamber, talking with the old mountaineer, and at the same time munching some food that had been secured at the cabin of Abe's friend, Jed Harkins.

It was a sight to gall a man. Here, directly before his eyes, Sikes saw the outlaws whose bodies represented so many thousand dollars to him if delivered to the Missouri authorities.

All that seemed necessary was to take a good aim, give the word, and, with the double report, the awful deed would be done.

Was Abe equal to it?

He could hear the man grating his teeth, and there flashed into Sikes' mind the recollection of what he had determined respecting Abe—that the man was governed by some motive of revenge as deep as the gratitude of old Derrick was strong.

Yes, Abe could be depended on.

He was in for blood.

"Can you take Frank," asked the other.

"Yes," whispered Abe, in reply.

"Nothing in the way?"

"All clear."

"Then take a dead aim."

A few seconds had elapsed.

"How are you?" whispered Sikes, believing the moment had arrived when the world was about to be relieved from the presence of two men whose names had become synonymous with terror in their Missouri haunts, especially among express messengers and railroad men generally.

"I've got him! Give the word!" came the low but terribly significant reply.

Sikes had opened his mouth to do so, when, just as suddenly, darkness so intense that it could almost be felt came upon the scene.

"Don't fire!" whispered the detective, hastily.

He would take no chances.

Unless they could make dead sure work of their men, it was folly to shoot and alarm them.

Better to lie low and trust to luck.

"What's wrong?" asked Abe.

He seemed all in a tremor, having been so near to shooting one of the dreaded James boys, and yet not firing.

"The light went out."

"Yes, I know that. D'ye think they know we're hyar?"

"I reckon."

"Then we'd better look out for squalls."

"Keep your gun ready. There's a screw loose somewhere, and we'll soon find out just where."

Abe was plainly uneasy.

He felt that they were in deadly danger while so near the enemy.

What were the others doing?

Had the light been put out purposely, and, if so, what was the idea?

Perhaps even then the James boys were creeping up, bent upon killing those who hunted them.

"What shall we do?" Abe asked, anxious to have the other make a move.

"Nothing. Lie on our oars a while and wait to see what developments come," was the reply.

"All right."

If the detective could stand it, there seemed no reason why he should not.

"Crouch here, back to back, and be ready to put in good work, if necessary."

"I'll fire at the first sight of 'em," declared Abe.

He, too, knew, from past experience, how ready the James boys were with their weapons, and did not mean to give them more of a chance than was absolutely necessary.

So they waited.

Low voices drifted to their ears, but to save their lives they could not place them.

Probably the three men were discussing the matter, and arriving at some conclusion.

Would they relight the lamp, either to resume their former occupation, or search for the parties whose presence they suspected?

If so, the two men in hiding could once more take aim and send their bullets in with the assurance that they would be fatal.

The minutes passed.

Gradually the voices grew fainter.

Were the men moving away, or was this merely a trap to engulf them?

Now, if ever, was the time for the detective to prove his sagacity.

He was no fool.

Had he been, he might have ordered the lantern lighted again, and perhaps have paid the penalty with his life, for how was he to be sure that the James boys had left the adjacent chamber?

Reaching out, he drew Abe near, and whispered in his ear words of encouragement.

"Patience; make no sound. I have an idea they have not gone, but, suspecting something, lie in wait. We can afford to lose a little time much better than to sacrifice our lives."

This struck Abe as good sense, and he proved quite willing to abide by the other's decision.

So they remained as silent as death.

Ears were continually strained in the endeavor to catch some sound that would indicate the proximity of the hunted men.

They heard nothing—at least, time passed on, and all remained quiet.

Sikes was a stayer; that was what he called himself, at any rate.

He did not give up easily.

The game was worth all it cost, seeing that the stakes were human lives—either their own, or those of the outlaws.

How long they remained thus they had no practical means of finding out, but it seemed like a long time, when a voice came from the darkness, somewhere ahead:

"This is all foolishness, Derrick. There's nobody around. Call it off, and give us a light."

Sikes punched Abe with his elbow, and the latter signified that he understood.

Their game was still on deck.

Would the mountaineer do as Jesse James requested, and start up the light?

If so, the time was at hand for business.

They faced in the direction of the voice, so as to be ready to get in their work, and nervously fingered the locks of their guns, waiting for the light to flash upon the scene.

CHAPTER VIII.

LEFT IN THE DARKNESS.

Another change came.

It reminded the detective of the time when he looked through a kaleidoscope; each turn of the hand formed new combinations of the colored glasses, and no two were alike.

The voice of old Derrick sounded.

"I tell you they are near by. I heard a whisper some time ago. You have ruined all by speaking aloud."

"Then what shall we do?" asked Jesse James, testily; "rush forward and grapple with the unseen foes in the dark?"

He was capable of just such work.

Not so Derrick.

The weight of years had brought wisdom to his brain, and he had long since ceased to act from mere impulse alone.

"No, not that; I will show you a better way," he said, quickly.

Then the voices, which could not be placed with any exactness, died away.

Abe was plainly uneasy, and the bold officer himself did not feel entirely complacent.

There seemed cause for nervousness.

The strange and mysterious words of the hermit must admit of a meaning.

What could it be?

He meant to do something.

Was he about to flash a light upon the scene from some her quarter that would reveal the position of the invaders, while himself and friends were concealed from view?

It might be so.

Bill Sikes did not like the idea of being made a target for such men as the James brothers to practice at.

On the whole, it might be better to move.

Should the others find nothing when they came to examine the place, they would conclude that they must have been mistaken.

Thus, feeling at ease again, they would be thrown off their guard, and, when the time came, the attacking party could once more secure the advantage.

He communicated his ideas to Abe, and was not at all surprised to find the other agree with him immediately. It suited Abe to get away from that dangerous vicinity once.

He believed in the present, and was willing to let the future look out for itself.

So they crawled away.

Luckily, they managed to find something behind which they could hide, and, when the light appeared on the scene, both men were flat upon their faces behind a bundle of clothes, just concealed and no more.

So close were the James boys that Abe and Bill hardly dared to move a finger for fear lest they should be discovered.

More than once the mountaineer, peering over the obstruction, thought he saw Jesse James looking him directly in the eye, and, feeling sure they were discovered, he was tempted to spring to his feet and trust to luck to win.

Fortunately for himself, he conquered this sudden irritation, and remained quiet.

They had no chance to use their guns, owing to the fact that in their suddenly assumed position they lay upon their weapons.

This was misery.

Minutes passed.

Almost within arms' reach of their terrible foes, and yet not daring to act.

Could a more exasperating position be imagined? No wonder the redoubtable Bill Sikes groaned mentally when he saw what a trap they had unwittingly crawled into.

There they lay while the two men talked of different things.

It began to grow desperate.

Such was their cramped position that they could hardly breathe.

Their limbs began to pain them fearfully.

Something must happen soon, or, goaded to action by the unbearable nature of their position, they would have risen up and taken the consequences, whatever they might be.

With ordinary men they might rely somewhat on scariness of their enemies by the abrupt manner of their appearance.

This would not count now.

The James boys were old hands at this sort of business, and they would not be likely to show any signs of being flustered, but would instantly open the battle.

Any one who knew them could tell what this meant, for they had become notorious for the astonishing rapidity with which they fired from the belt or pocket.

It seemed as though the conversation of the two men must be just for the benefit of those who listened near by.

They heard words that gave them a chill.

The James boys were rehearsing what terrible vengeance they would have upon those who were conspiring to run them out of Kentucky.

By and by it struck the detective that there could be little doubt that the others knew of their presence.

The words spoken seemed to be peculiarly adapted to the circumstances; too much so to be the mere result of chance.

This was very unpleasant.

His position had already become serious, because of the fact that he was lying upon his gun in a way that caused the weapon to dig him in the ribs, and now this awful thought came to add to his misery.

He could stand it no longer!

Even though it were death to make the move, he felt that he would have to do it.

In this he was forestalled.

The voice of Jesse James suddenly rang out:

"Cover 'em, Frank!"

Immediately a brace of heavy revolvers gleamed in the lamplight and were aimed at the two men crouching behind the bundles.

Back of these were the faces of the Missouri desperadoes, gleaming with the fierce light of aroused passion.

Death was very near.

Bill Sikes sat up.

He looked his enemies full in the eyes.

It was not the first time in his life that he had come so near his doom.

Did he cringe?

Not a whit.

It was this fact that really saved his life, for the outlaws had no use for a cringing coward, and would have fired had he begun to beg for mercy.

Bravery is respected by savage and soldier, and even these desperadoes saw something to admire in his dauntless demeanor.

"Fire and end it!" exclaimed Sikes at last, with something of a groan, for the suspense was almost enough to turn a man's brain.

"I'll be hanged if I do," said Jesse James; "step out here and give yourself up."

Life was sweet.

Especially does this fact come true when one has given up all hope.

The drowning sailor plucked from a watery grave can readily affirm this fact.

Bill Sikes was human, and he accepted the favor at the hands of a man he meant to bring to his death.

"It would be policy for you to shoot me, Jesse James, for my mission in life is to hunt you to your death," he said, frankly, as he stood in front of his captor with folded arms.

Jesse James laughed harshly.

"Perhaps I'll take a notion that way yet. Don't

worry yourself about it. For the present we choose to make you prisoners."

Abe had also come out.

He hardly knew what was about to happen, but felt that he was in for it, and, come weal or come woe, must share the fortunes of his chief.

Frank James disarmed them both.

"Now sit down," said the other.

Old Derrick looked on with some wonder.

He could not understand why his partner was on the ground, and surveyed him with something of reproach.

Abe did not mind this.

He was thinking of what might be ahead of him, for Abe expected nothing less than death at the hands of these vindictive outlaws.

As yet the men had not decided what they would do in the matter.

They withdrew to consult.

As a result, Jesse James advanced to the men whom fortune had thrown in his power.

"Your bravery has saved you from instant death, Bill Sikes. If you will swear to give over this chase of Frank and myself, we will let you go free. I believe you are a man of your word."

Sikes shook his head.

"I can't promise, for I would break it. I am determined to hunt you down unless fate takes my life away. Now do your worst."

Jesse James shrugged his shoulders.

"As you will. We mean to leave you here, and take away the rope at the entrance."

So this was the doom in store for them.

"Is there no other way of leaving this place?" asked the detective.

"Yes, but the chances of your finding it are about as one in ten."

"Still, you leave in that way—you could not well climb that rope."

"I don't hanker after the experience," remarked the desperado, with a short laugh; "here we leave you, and, should you by good fortune get out of this place, we may meet again. Otherwise, a long sleep until eternity awaits you."

It was a cruel act.

Probably it would have been more merciful for the outlaws to have killed them.

There was a chance, however—one in ten—and, if fortune was kind, they might find it.

Both men were willing to fight hard.

Abe was despondent.

Not so Sikes.

He noted the direction in which their enemies had gone, and, although they had been warned that it was death to follow, he did pursue the retreating trio as long as he was able.

Abe followed him.

He did not want to be left alone—otherwise he would not have had the ambition to advance.

At last the light died out ahead.

They were wrapped in intense darkness that seemed almost palpable.

There is something terrible in such a position, and men have gone stark mad wandering only a few hours in

black passages, like the catacombs under the old city of Rome.

Imagination becomes excited; minutes seem hours, and the wretched men really experience all the horrors of starvation within six hours, believing it is as many days that have passed.

Fortunately for them both, the detective was a very cool man, and was not apt to lose his head, even under such circumstances as these.

He proceeded in a systematic manner, marked the spot to which they had followed the others, and then endeavored to make his way back to the central chamber again.

Success greeted him thus far.

When he reached the chamber he lighted a match, and presently had a torch blazing.

Plenty of these lay around.

Abe plucked up courage to work when he could see once more, and willingly obeyed the directions of the man with whom he had engaged.

They found plenty to eat in the chamber, and ere starting out, Sikes made preparations in case they were unable to get back to the place again, carrying torches and food along with them.

The search began.

Weary hours were spent.

Success seemed as far off as ever when they lay down, tired out with their tramp, and slept.

Awaking after a time, they ate a meal, such as it was, lighted a torch, and continued the hunt.

Almost hopeless it seemed.

Men will fight desperately for life, and these two were not to be daunted as long as a mouthful of food or a splinter of torchwood remained.

At last, when they had eaten all their food, fortune was kind—their last torch expired, and through the darkness that ensued they saw a gleam of light.

Hastening toward it, they found an opening, and passed from gloom to daylight.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FERRY.

Even this bitter experience was not enough to cool the ardor of Bill Sikes.

If possible, he was more determined than ever to secure the capture or death of the men who had so long defied the powers of the law.

Abe had to do considerable reflection before he announced his intention of joining the detective in the great hunt.

Although far from being a coward, he was not made of the same clay from which the detective had been fashioned—in plainer words, Abe could not be put in the same class with Bill.

By pondering over his wrongs of the past, whatever they might be, Abe finally worked himself up into a state of mind where he could declare his willingness to accompany his leader.

They found that two days had gone by, and it was nearly evening on the second when the two men drew up in the little village, weary and hungry, yet close-mouthed

with regard to the peculiar adventure that had happened to them.

Here they sought and found refreshment.

At a tavern they ate a square meal, and secured a bed piece for the night.

It would be impossible to set about following the outlaws until morning.

Hence, they might as well become as thoroughly refreshed as possible during the interim, so that they could have their best foot forward when the time for starting finally came.

Sikes was not the man to be idle.

After eating a hearty meal, he felt new life enthused throughout his being.

So he began casting around and asking questions.

Bill Sikes soon learned all there was to pick up with regard to the revenue raid.

Then he began making inquiries concerning the men whose whereabouts he was so anxious to discover.

Had they fled the country?

What about Derrick.

The old moonshiner was still in the vicinity, and gathering his material together with the idea of using it in a new hiding place.

He had professed to be much worried over the disappearance of his friend Abe, and professed a desire to hunt for the other if he failed to turn up inside of another day.

Were the James boys around?

They had shaken the dust of the neighborhood from their feet, and had not been seen since the shooting match by many of the people.

By cautious questioning, the detective learned a certain fact that he seized upon.

One Hank Peebles had seen two men answering the description of the James boys on the road toward the river, making their way leisurely along.

Where could this man be found?

The detective meant to interview him.

Fortune favored him.

There was Hank now, his informant told him, just entering the tavern—for as the night drew on, all the loungers of the village were wont to collect around the bar and tell stories.

So Bill Sikes tackled Peebles.

He found him a hard subject to handle, for Hank was apt to stray in his way from the subject on which he was engaged; but he now had a master-hand to guide his erring steps.

The detective put him through his paces.

He kept Peebles pinned down to the truth, and when he showed a disposition to kick down the bars and wander, Bill would bring him up with a round turn by means of a few questions direct to the point.

Thus he was soon in possession of all that the man knew about the matter.

It was not a great deal, but it served the detective as a pointer.

He knew the line of retreat taken by the enemy.

Evidently the James boys were not hurrying themselves in their retreat from Kentucky.

They had no need.

Accustomed to relying upon themselves in all times of danger, they saw no necessity for worry.

Perhaps they would stop again, if the whim came to them, and settle down to a life of ease.

They had acquaintances and friends scattered here and there through the western part of the State.

Why should they have cause for fear?

The men who chased them so bitterly were entombed alive in the underground den of the old hermit moonshiner.

True, he had announced his intention of seeking them after the third day, but the chances were they would have all the conceit taken out of them when found, and would not care to continue the pursuit farther.

Some of these things Sikes learned, others he surmised; but he made sure of discovering all that Hank Peebles knew upon the subject.

They left the village soon after daybreak, and reached a pike where a stage was due at a certain hour, and which would help them on their way, if they could only intercept it.

The morning was bright.

It had an effect on their spirits, and raised their hopes of success.

The stage was on time.

They heard it coming, and soon mounted to the top, where the bracing November air, crisp and frosty, almost took their breath away.

Thus they rode along for several hours.

When a point was reached where they must leave the stage, they had learned something that proved the wisdom of their policy of riding on top.

The driver—like most of his class—knew about everything that transpired in the country, and had his opinion on every subject.

He remembered the two men of whom Sikes spoke, perfectly well.

They had ridden beside him, but he had failed to draw them into conversation, which was a remarkable fact for him.

Yes, they had left the stage at a certain point.

He remembered it, because they had made certain inquiries concerning a man by the name of Ferguson.

Sikes also asked about this party, and learned all he could as to his whereabouts.

He was sure the James boys would put up with this person for a time at least.

When they quitted the stage, Abe and the detective found themselves upon a lonely road, not more than three miles from the Mississippi River.

It was along this road the men they sought had gone two days before, according to the story of Hank Peebles, who had seen them, and the stage-driver, who had dropped them at this point.

It was about noon.

The sun shone brightly, but dark clouds hung along the horizon, promising wind and a wild night.

So much the better.

Their plans might be better carried out under such circumstances—there are times when such a thing as quiet is distasteful.

Cautiously advancing, they finally caught distant glimpses of the river.

Ferguson lived on the bank.

He at times acted as a ferryman, and had a peculiar boat, in which he used to take people and teams across the river, propelled by an ungainly sail that could be used when the wind was fair.

CHAPTER X.

NEW ARRIVALS.

It was in this ferry-house by the side of the great rolling river that Bill Sikes and his mountaineer companion expected to find the men whom they hunted.

Here lived Ferguson.

The Missouri outlaws were within sight of their native State, and, in the event of any trouble, could cross over to the other side; a rowboat could be used, if other means failed.

When they came to a point where they could look down the road and see about where the ferryman's house stood, it was concluded that the time had arrived to act with due caution.

Therefore they retired into the woods.

A lunch had been eaten, which they had been wise enough to bring along.

When that had been done they were in good trim to get in their work.

When a couple of hours had gone by they were in a position to look down upon the ferryman's house from a little elevation.

The blue wood smoke curled lazily up from the pipe sticking through the roof.

There was no breeze as yet.

That would come later, when the black lines of clouds drew above the trees, and swept down upon them from the west.

No one had as yet been seen.

There were boats below; the scow with the sail lay lazily anchored just where a rope could swing her stern in.

A rowboat was drawn up on the low beach, for the road cut through the bank to the very edge of the water.

Three things seemed to indicate that the ferryman must be on the Kentucky side.

He was an old bachelor, and lived alone, save when some congenial spirit took up temporary quarters with him.

Sikes and Abe were exceedingly careful not to expose themselves.

They were almost within pistol-shot of the house; certainly not more than three hundred feet away from the log cabin.

Fortunately it was gloomy in the spot where they had taken up their stand.

Hence the chances of discovery were few, and they could have a certain amount of freedom in moving about.

About three o'clock a man came out of the cabin and walked to the edge of the bluff.

Here he stood.

He seemed to be looking over the vast expanse of water in the direction of the Missouri shore, for he shaded his eyes with his hand.

The attitude was very picturesque.

Just at this moment the sun had broken out from

among the clouds, and its rays fell upon the man standing there.

It was Jesse James.

The two watchers knew him well.

With a rifle a fair shot could have sent a bullet through the outlaw while he stood.

They did not have the rifle, and it is doubtful whether they would have made the attempt even had such a weapon been in their hands.

There was a chance of missing.

That would ruin all.

Even if the outlaw was shot down, his brother would escape.

On the whole, it was best to wait until night came and then crawl up closer to the house, where they could make sure work of it when the time came to fire.

So they quietly bided their time.

Some signs of life were seen about the house, and Ferguson appeared.

He carried an armful of wood.

The November air was rather chilly.

Perhaps he knew the nature of the windstorm that would soon sweep down upon them.

Crossing the wide expanse of water it would be apt to prove pretty cold by the time it sung about their ears.

Frank James did not show up for some time.

When he did it was seen that he had his arm in a rude sling.

There had been no fight.

How then had he been hurt.

The chances were it was some old wound broken out afresh.

At any rate, he was on the invalid list for the time being, though these men were never so badly hurt but that they would fight like wildcats.

The day was gradually drawing near its close, and the two men among the trees were satisfied with the way things had gone.

They felt pretty sure that nothing had been done to betray their presence.

This was good so far as it went.

Another thing Sikes brought to the attention of his companion; this was the fact that in all probability the men would not have any desire to leave the house on this night.

The wind was rising.

It already soughed among the bare tree-tops, and was sweeping over the river with considerable force, rendering the use of the sail boat utterly impossible, as it was dead ahead.

Should the wind increase in violence, it would be equally impossible for the rowboat to be used, as it would be swamped in the seas.

Hence, it looked as though the men were bound to stay where they were.

This suited their plans.

They even saw the storm increase with positive satisfaction.

Men will do almost anything for the sake of revenge, and what mattered exposure to the cold, if by such action they could gain their desired end.

Thus the day closed.

It promised to be a very stormy night—one that would

use steamers on the river to head for the shelter of the west shore.

A light appeared in the cabin.

Just at this juncture two men came along the road, mounted on horses.

It was too dark for the detective to see their faces, but he cocked his ears and listened to their voices, for there was something familiar in the tones of one rider.

"I think I know that man," he said.

"Any friend of the James boys?" asked Abe.

"Yes, an old comrade on many a foray and battle; the Dick Little."

"I have heard of him; he's as tough a customer as the others."

If these horsemen proved to be friends of the James boys, their work would be rendered doubly difficult; hence, it can be believed they watched their progress with great interest.

Sure enough, the horsemen came to a halt before the cabin.

The bridles were fastened to the rude palings of a fence that stood just in front of the modest little cabin, where Ferguson lived in his lonely bachelor way.

Then the men sprang to the ground, for the operation of tossing the bridles over the palings had been accomplished while mounted.

Some one came out of the cabin.

Yes, it was Jesse James.

He advanced and greeted the newcomers warmly, after which all of them entered the cabin.

The two spies turned and looked at each other with some chagrin.

"Our task grows harder, Abe."

"Seems like it," despondently.

"Four, instead of two."

"That crowd could whip a score of deputy marshals. What show have we?"

Abe was feeling bad.

He had been so sure of success before, and now the ground seemed slipping from under him. His supporters were knocked away, in fact.

His work was made of different timber.

He could not be disconcerted.

In his composition there was a good deal of the bull-dog, and even if there had been a dozen men opposed to each one a Jesse James, still he would have shut his teeth and endeavored to win by strategy what he could not accomplish by force.

Upon Abe's face there was a ferocious look.

It seemed more of the vindictive gleam such as appears in the eyes of a cornered rat, desperate and determined.

He was a man who would not hesitate to resort to extreme measures, should the occasion seem to call for them.

At that time, in his mind, had now arrived.

He fumbled in his pocket, and produced a small box, with a screw top.

After this he hung, slowly undoing the lid, and gazing at the contents lovingly, as though his greatest treasure.

The detective paid no attention to him at first.

After a while he noticed that something was in the wind.

The darkness had only partially descended, and he could see what Abe was doing.

"Abe!"

"Yes!"

"What have you there?"

The other gave a forced laugh.

"What some people nowadays call a civilizer, or leveler of caste. Anarchists make use of it in Russia and other countries. They're preparing to spring it on us here, I reckon."

"Jupiter! do you mean a bomb?"

"Just that!"

"Let me see it."

Abe, without hesitation, handed the thing over.

"Any danger in handling?"

"Not a bit. You see the fuse tucked beside it—that has to be lighted first."

"How do you know the length of time it will take to reach the bomb? It would be rather unpleasant to have it explode while one was putting the match to the fuse."

Abe laughed again.

"That's easily arranged! I've tried it. The fuse burns at the rate of an inch a minute."

"It is how long?"

"A foot."

"Ah! then you can regulate it to suit your taste—all the way up to twelve minutes."

"Yes."

"This is rather a small affair. Would it do much damage, Abe?"

"They use one a quarter the size to destroy stumps in the section where I live. You see a puff of smoke, hear a dull report, and your stump is entirely demoralized."

"And this size?"

"Placed under yonder cabin and fired, it would blow every soul into eternity," declared the mountaineer, calmly.

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

He did not like to handle such a terrible little explosive, and gave it back.

"That might come in handy some time, but I should hardly like to use it."

"I only mean to if driven to it. Perhaps this little bomb may save our lives yet."

"Who knows? Stranger things have happened. Tell the truth, Abe. You were thinking of putting it under that house?"

"Well, such a thought came to me, but what you have said has made me dismiss it. You can't appreciate my feelings in this matter."

"You have wrongs, then, to lay at their door?"

"I have. Some time I may tell you the story; but not now, not now."

After that the detective felt different toward this man—he realized that it was no ordinary motive that influenced his actions, but the emotions of a troubled past.

CHAPTER XI.

A SPY AT THE WINDOW.

Twilight had gone.

In its stead came the blackness of night.

Looking around them, only one light could be seen anywhere.

This flashed through the window of the ferryman's cabin, and looked like a beacon to a weary, wayworn traveler.

Had there been any such wandering along the road on this night, he would have been glad indeed to have sighted the light.

The storm from the west was now sweeping across the wide waters.

Its force was tremendous.

No rain accompanied it—that might come later, or else snow, for it was really cold enough for the latter.

The ferryman had come out with a lantern, and one of the men.

His object was to take a last look at the moorings of the sailscow and see that it was all right.

Afterward they pulled the rowboat far up on the land, where the waves could not reach it.

Now let the wind do its worst.

Nothing under heaven could tempt Ferguson to venture upon the raging Mississippi during a gale like this, and should a traveler desire to cross he would have to bide his time.

Fortunately the two men who watched the cabin were warmly clad.

They would have need of all the warmth their bodies could arouse before this night had become a thing of the past.

Sheltered behind a wooded knoll, within a stone's throw of the ferryman's cottage, they awaited the time when they must take part in the drama to be enacted there.

The road was just beside them.

Had any person come along they must surely know the fact.

The detective could keep quiet no longer.

He asked Abe to remain where he lay, and wait for him, as he meant to advance and spy upon those in the cabin.

This Abe seemed willing to do, not that he feared the results of such action, but, knowing what a night's work was before them, and feeling very comfortable, he was not in any hurry to rush things at all.

Sikes crept forward.

His objective point was the window from whence came that flood of light.

It beckoned him on.

There was another small window on the other side of the cabin.

He knew it, because in moving forward he had seen the flash of light out upon the wild waves that, driven by the west wind, were lashing upon the Kentucky shore.

In addition to his duty as ferryman, Ferguson seemed to occupy the position of a lighthouse man, for surely the light he sent out upon the waters on a dark, stormy night like this must have told pilots on the river just where they were.

It did not take the detective more than ten minutes to reach the cabin.

He had no fear of there being any sentry on duty outside.

The men within suspected no danger and did not worry over the matter.

Here, in this lonely spot and on a stormy night what had they to fear.

When he reached the cabin the detective made one discovery that displeased him.

The window was just above his head.

It was a small affair, but this was not an unusual occurrence.

What bothered him most was the fact of its being at such an elevation.

How was he to reach it?

A barrel stood at one corner of the house.

As it was underneath a pipe, Sikes understood that its mission was to catch water.

He moved the barrel and tilted it over until the water had all run out.

Then he started to gently get it over to the spot where its assistance was desired.

It rolled easily, and in a few minutes he had reached his destination.

Then the barrel was raised on end, bottom up.

Before mounting he tried it to see that it stood on a firm foundation, for the task he had undertaken was too full of danger to run any additional risks through the treacherous fact that a stone might be under the chime of the barrel and thus destroy his equilibrium.

So far as he could discover all was well.

There was, however, one thing he could not insure; this lay in the stanchness of the bottom of the barrel.

The only way to avoid a possible disaster was to put as little of his weight as he could there.

He mounted.

The small window was at his service now, and he could easily accomplish all that he expected to perform.

It had a pane of glass in it.

He acted very cautiously, knowing well that some hostile eye might chance to be upturned and discover his face unless he was careful.

Soon he found himself surveying the interior of the cabin.

A wood fire blazed on the hearth, and looked very cheerful to the man who shivered without.

In front of this the men were seated upon a bench, Jesse James alone having a chair.

Ferguson, unused to such company, was bustling around preparing supper, and from the savory odor that crept out somehow to the nostrils of the detective, he ascertained that the men were about to be well fed at any rate.

He listened.

Just as he had expected, the four desperadoes were bringing up events in their past.

At length Ferguson called out that supper was on the table, at which there was some haste displayed to get a place, showing that the men must at least have their appetites keenly whetted.

As some one was bound to sit facing the window, Sikes knew his chances of discovery would be increased,

he considered this a good time to withdraw and report to Abe.

He rolled the barrel over to the corner again to run his chance of discovery, for should Ferguson come out and find it bottom up under the window he must suspect the truth.

Having thus covered his tracks as well as he was able, the detective left the cabin and began to move over the back trail in the direction of the knoll.

Here he expected to find Abe impatiently waiting for him to put in an appearance.

No doubt the other would wonder what had kept him so long, and by this time must have become somewhat impatient.

They could talk the matter over and decide what plan might prove best under the circumstances.

As he drew near the spot where he had left his companion Sikes thought he heard voices.

Could the men have come out of the cabin?

It must be something of unusual importance that could drag them away from supper and the warmth of the fire. Turning his head, he looked back.

So far as he could see the cabin door was still closed. It did not look as though the men had issued forth, and his ears had not deceived him, and he heard voices, they must have come from some other quarter.

Ah! again they reached his ear.

As sure as he lived they came from the quarter where he had left Abe!

CHAPTER XII.

JEB PROVES TOO MUCH FOR THE BARREL.

Thoroughly surprised by this strange occurrence, Bill Sikes cautiously advanced upon the party.

He could not but smile at the ridiculous feature of such a piece of business.

It was enough that he had to spy upon the enemy's camp without performing the same duty for his own quarters; yet the circumstances appeared to justify such action.

Several men were talking.

He drew nearer and listened.

A name fell upon his ears.

"Tell that to the marines, Jed," said a voice.

The detective started.

He knew only one man by that name, and this was the old sharpshooter.

Could it be possible Harkins was present?

What had brought him hither?

He surely had not come alone.

Another voice told of a third party, Abe making up the second.

Ah! it did not prove so difficult, after all, to make out this worthy's identity.

Of course it was Lige Bigelow.

The two men had been rivals and enemies in one sense, so long as they competed for the honors of being the best shot in the country.

But no sooner had a third party jumped in ahead of them than their old scores were buried, and from that hour on they were as brothers, with one common object

in view—the death or capture of the notorious outlaws from Missouri.

Sikes grinned as he realized how kind Dame Fortune had been.

Here was the acquisition to their forces they had been longing for.

It would help amazingly.

Now the two sides were somewhat evenly balanced, four all, if Ferguson was counted out.

The chances were that should a fight occur the old ferryman might make an interesting factor in the affair, and perhaps turn the tide in favor of those whom he now called his guests.

At any rate Sikes was well pleased.

He stepped forward.

"Abe!"

"On deck here!" sung out the other.

Bill was alarmed lest the sound might in some way reach the ears of the enemy.

"For Heaven's sake, speak more softly, man—a window is open, and they might hear you."

"We have reinforcements."

"So I see, or rather hear. Jed, glad to have your honest hand in the business—Lige, ditto. But how the deuce did you come?"

The two men chuckled.

"You ain't the only un as kin ask questions, Mister Detective. Lige an' me found sartin things as set us to connin' the matter over, and—wall, the result am we are hyar."

"Walked?"

"Every foot of the way."

"How did you find Abe?"

"Thar's whar the luck come in. Ye see we knowed we was treading on dangerous ground, an' when we sighted the light in a window we knowed we had best go slow."

"Suddenly, when I was talkin' in a low tone to Lige, some one said :

"'Ah, Jed, is that you, now?"

"Of course it was Abe, and we were glad to jine forces with ye, for, judgin' from what he said we had to contend against, we have need o' all our number."

"That is where I agree with you, Jed."

"Ye've been spyin' on 'em, Abe says."

"Yes."

"Seen anything?"

"Well, a little."

"An' heard as much?"

"I've heard enough to hang every one of the men in that cabin, if they should ever fall into the clutches of the law. As such a thing is almost out of the question, we will have to do the next best thing—riddle them with bullets, and claim the reward."

"That's my logic," said Abe, solemnly.

"Count me in," came from the sharpshooter, as he nervously fingered the lock of his rifle and gritted his teeth savagely.

"Ditto," grunted Lige.

Finally it was concluded to make an advance along that line.

They could close in upon the cabin and then arrange to open the game.

With the wild wind increasing in violence rather than diminishing, they advanced and soon drew near the cabin window.

Bill took the lead, as he was entitled to it.

The others were only too glad to have a captain who would show them the way to victory.

Again the water barrel came into use, and was placed under the window.

The object was to give each man a chance to see the lay of the land.

Bill did not like his soldiers to go at a thing in a blind way, and believed they could do better work when they saw what lay ahead.

He took an observation himself first.

The situation inside the cabin had not materially changed.

He sprang to the ground.

"Take a look, one at a time. Then you will know just how matters stand," he said.

Abe, being closer than the others, clambered upon the barrel.

"Steady, boy," as the barrel teetered, a pebble being under one side of it.

The mountaineer detective took a steady and cautious look through the opening.

He was satisfied in a couple of minutes, and climbed down from his position a little more carefully than he had gone up.

"Next!" said Bill Sikes.

This time it was Lige.

The detective had meanwhile managed to straighten the barrel, so that it now rested on a secure foundation.

Bigelow handed his rifle to Jed.

Then he put a knee on the barrel and drew his bulky frame upward.

Sikes whispered in his ear.

"Keep on the sides—center is weak, I fear."

This gave the other fair warning, and he managed to go through with the business safely.

Jed alone remained.

He signified that he did not care much about it, but Sikes thought otherwise, and hence he set about ending the performance.

It was well done.

The detective soon had cause to regret that he insisted upon this measure.

Jed succeeded in gaining an upright position, but as his head was far above the opening he had to bend in order to utilize the window.

As he glanced in he was disconcerted by seeing Frank James turn his head and glance upward at the opening, as though he had just felt a draught.

Jed, in confusion, stepped back, planted his full weight upon the center of the barrel head, which responded to the challenge by an immediate collapse.

CHAPTER XIII

HEDGED IN.

The best laid plans of mice and men often go in a contrary way; Burns tells us this in his broad Scotch way, and there never was a truer fact stated than this same.

Jed, cautious fellow that he was deemed, had made blunder, and the whole fabric must suffer.

When the top of the barrel gave way under the sudden shifting of the tall mountaineer's weight, he sank through with astonishing rapidity.

The detective was somewhat shocked at the sudden termination of his dream of success.

He muttered something about the tough luck of it all but of course that would mend nothing.

Jed stood upright in the barrel.

"Come out of that, man," said Sikes, knowing the were in for it, and fully expecting to have the quartet of outlaws thundering at them presently.

Jed made an effort and slowly emerged from his peculiar prison, vigorously rubbing that part of his anatomy where blood had been drawn.

Strange to say, the inmates of the cabin had not put in an appearance.

Could it be possible that they had not heard the row?

Sikes looked up at the window, or, rather, endeavored to see it, for the darkness prevented his discovering its exact location.

The light no longer blazed from the aperture like an evil eye.

This was a significant fact.

Unquestionably those inside must have heard the noise and extinguished the light.

Why they had failed to rush out was a question to be guessed at.

Perhaps caution dictated their actions, and, suspecting that a large party had been formed to effect their capture, they allowed discretion to take the part of valor.

It was strange, too.

Jesse James had never gained the reputation of being a discreet man.

If the mood was upon him he would not hesitate to jump into the midst of a posse of officers and declare his identity, daring them to do their worst.

Then why should he remain under cover now?

It may be he had an idea the door was guarded by a dozen guns, and that his appearance would be the signal for a volley that must riddle him.

Bill Sikes saw an opportunity to at least undo some of the mischief.

He seized the barrel and placed it in position at the corner of the house, shoving the pieces of its treacherous bottom underneath.

It would take a very close examination to tell that any disaster had befallen the water barrel, and a casual glance would never betray the fact.

This was all very well.

What could they do next?

At Bill's advice they kept their firearms ready for immediate use, and then followed him up to the door of the cabin.

Carefully he tried this, not knowing but what it might be suddenly flung open, and a volley fired in their faces from the men within.

There could be no telling what such parties might be up to—they knew how to meet danger, and handle their firearms in a way that inspired terror in the hearts of those who were their enemies.

The door was secured inside.

either this had been done since old Jed gave the order or before, they could only conjecture. In any rate they were barred out. In order to accomplish anything they must necessarily resort to other means.

It was where Bill Sikes came in handy, with his inventive genius which nothing in the way of disaster could disconcert.

In one thing failed him he was ready with another. Those inside the cabin had arranged it so that even by means of the regular door was denied him, he could find another way of accomplishing his end. The thing he had noted.

The house was built on stilts.

The lower floor stood a foot or more from the ground, so a man could easily crawl under it.

But this was done he cared not.

The builder of the cabin may have had eccentric ideas, but Sikes was possessed of certain sanitary notions. He muttered little.

Sikes took things as he found them, and made use of any material.

He muttered a few words to Abe and then crawled under the house, while the other three retreated a short distance to await developments.

Sikes found little trouble in making his way along.

The space did not allow him to get on his knees, it afforded a chance to wriggle on after the fashion of a snake.

He made progress.

He crawled under the middle of the floor above, as near as he could estimate it, he paused to listen.

He hoped to find out what the men were doing, not expecting to hear what they might say, but could learn from their actions. Sikes flattered himself that he had as good a pair of ears as any man on earth.

Once, however, they seemed to fail him. As he could, he caught no sound that would indicate the presence of his foes.

They were still above?

He seemed almost incredible that men could remain so long in such a place.

He yet how was there any chance for them to escape if he knew of none, since they had watched the door when the alarm had sounded.

Was there any underground passage?

He had had considerable experience in just such matters as this, and always kept one eye out to discover any sign out of the ordinary.

He began groping around to see if there could be any opening as a hole beneath the floor.

Finding none, he concluded that the water from the well would preclude such a possibility, and that he need not look longer.

Just as he was about to give up, a slight noise above reached him.

Men were there; they had waited as long as necessary for some move on the part of their

supposed enemies, and when none came were about to make a move themselves.

Some one spoke.

"I'm going out and see what's what."

No one but Jesse James uttered those words, and the detective under his feet ground his teeth together, as though in rage at having given up the ship so easily.

If he were only out with his men guarding the door, what a surprise they would give the outlaw, as he stepped from the cabin.

As it was, he had given orders to the others that they were not to fire until he called upon them.

Bill thought of crawling out and scuttling away, but it was too late to think of such action.

Already light could be seen.

The door was open.

A man with a lantern of some sort came out, and by this time it would have been impossible to have issued forth from under the cabin, as he flashed the light this way and that.

So all Bill could do was to push back again, hoping to find some means of egress on the opposite side, which hope, however, was doomed to speedy extinguishment, for space, soon ceased to be of respectable size, owing to the ground being higher on that side than the other.

He managed to secrete himself behind what appeared to be a pile of some sort, driven into the ground to sustain the weight of the house.

Voices were heard.

The men must have all issued from the cabin, and were looking about them, as Jesse James flashed the light of his bull's-eye this way and the other, their hands holding guns and revolvers ready for immediate use, in case the enemy was uncovered.

Probably it was a good thing, for some one, that those in league with the detective had taken the precaution to hide behind tree trunks, or throw themselves flat behind the hummocks at their base.

"No one in sight," declared Frank James.

"What do you say, Ferguson?"

"I am almost dead certain some critter smashed into my water butt here."

"And I myself could swear I saw a face up at the window. It vanished as I looked, and immediately came the noise Ferguson speaks of."

"If any one looked in up here, he must have had something to stand on."

"Throw the light down here."

Jesse James obeyed.

Immediately exclamations arose.

"They've been here, sure enough. See the footprints, by thunder!"

"And the mark of the bar'l, too!"

"Get that light around again. It may be a trap for us, Jesse?" called out Dick Little, half raising the revolver he carried.

Of course they saw nothing.

Every man of the trio heard the cries, and made sure to lie low, knowing full well that to expose even a head meant discovery and death.

"Try the bar'l, Fergy," sang out one of the outlaws.

The ferryman upset the water butt.

"Bottom out! It had water a foot deep in it two

hours back, because I used some for supper. See, hyar's where it's been spilled."

"More evidence."

"There's only one thing we want to know—who are those spies—enemies of yours, Ferguson, or wolves on our Kentucky trail?"

The ferryman shook his head.

"I don't know o' any man around here that'd care to spy on me or do me harm," he replied, earnestly.

"Then it must be us they want."

"There's another thing we'd like to know," remarked the fourth man, solemnly.

"What's that?"

"Where have these wolves gone? We ought to know so that we could tear them to pieces."

"Yes, we must find out."

"Hold the light down. Perhaps we can get some information from the earth."

It was a simple idea, and yet pregnant with great possibilities—indeed, the man under the house shrugged his shoulders as he contemplated the increasing chance of an encounter at close quarters with the enemy.

They would surely discover that a man had crawled under the house, but would not be able to see where he had come out again; hence it must stand to reason he was still in the recess between the floor and the earth.

As he expected, a low cry announced that the discovery had been made.

All bent over to examine the marks.

Then the light was turned farther on to see whether there were more signs.

Of course they failed to find them.

"By the gods, I believe the fool is still under the house!" yelled Dick Little.

"Then we'll slaughter him."

"Down with the light; turn it on strong, and fire at the sight of his eyes."

It was looking pretty squally for the man who crouched behind the pile, his back reared up against the flooring in the endeavor to keep as much of his body out of sight as he could.

He never had believed himself a stout man, but just then it seemed to him that he was as fat as Falstaff of old, and the pile a mere shadow.

CHAPTER XIV.

BILL SIKES GOES ALOFT.

Imagination goes a great way with all of us, and just at this particular moment it played such a sad game with the detective that he was fairly miserable.

He knew several weapons were aiming in his direction, and supposed his huge proportions were cropping out on either side of the post.

In reality he was receiving excellent protection behind the pile.

"I see him," said a voice.

Bill allowed his breath to go out from his lungs, as though that would materially assist him in the endeavor to appear small.

"And I," came another voice.

"Then give it to him."

The words were hardly spoken than there was a crash of firearms.

How deafening the sound when under the floor of the cabin.

Was Sikes slain?

He hardly knew what the result was himself for the moment.

Then he made it out.

Not a scratch.

The several bullets had entered the log upright, which were meant to end his life.

Sikes experienced a feeling of intense relief, realizing that he had builded better than he knew, but this did not end it.

More must follow.

"Got him?" asked the man, holding the lantern.

"I believe so."

"Make it sure, Dick."

"Then give me the light."

"What would you do?"

"Crawl under and finish him."

Jesse James relinquished the bull's-eye to his companion of many a foray, and watched him get down flat upon the ground.

It looked as though the case was getting very interesting now.

Dick Little advanced slowly.

There were numerous causes for this.

In the first place his position rendered rapid progress impossible.

Then again each hand was full—one grasped his revolver while the other took hold of the bull's-eye lantern, so that the reflected light should be cast out in front.

As a third reason why his progress was slow, it must be remembered that he believed a deadly foe was in front of him, and that possibly a duel might take place, which, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, would be a terrible one.

All the same he made progress.

Straight in the direction of the upright support of the cabin he made his way.

A collision seemed impossible to avoid.

Still the detective did not fire.

How was that?

Dick Little was now close to the object which in the peculiar light they had taken for the figure of their enemy.

"Hello, thar!"

"What is it, Dick?"

"This ain't no man."

"The deuce you say?"

"It's a support of the house."

Ferguson muttered something.

He had forgotten this fact.

"Are you sure it's what you shot at?"

"I can see the two bullet holes in the log."

"That settles it."

"The man has been here, though."

"How d'ye know?"

"Marks on the ground tell it."

"Perhaps he's crawled farther under," suggested Ferguson, who seemed ill at ease, as though a certain thought had entered his head and he was worrying over it.

A short interval of silence ensued.

"What d'ye see, Dick?"

"Nothing."

"Looked all around?"

"Yes. I can see the wall of the house. He ain't under here, that's dead sartin."

"Then you might as well come out," suggested Jesse James, quietly.

"Reckon I shall."

He squirmed around until his head was pointed in their direction, when he put on steam and forged ahead.

The thing was soon done.

Handing the lantern to his leader, he brushed some of the dirt from his clothes.

Jesse James flashed the penetrating light around in all directions, but discovered nothing.

"Reckon we might as well go inside," he said.

"Yes, this wind's mighty penetrating after sitting by that warm fire."

"Besides, even if there are enemies about they ain't going to do anything while the gale holds, during the night, and in the morning if the wind goes down we're off over the river."

This idea seemed to strike them all favorably, and they prepared to carry it out.

So they trooped through the door of the cabin, which stood near by, closed it after them and securely barred

This was all very fine, but what about Bill?

Where was he?

Had his efforts to contract his size been so successful that he had been able to elude the shrewd vision of the main robber?

Hardly so.

Some other more plausible reason must be advanced for his disappearance.

Let us investigate.

When the shots were fired, Sikes had involuntarily humped his back up a little.

Thus it pressed against the flooring above.

After he had made the discovery that he was not wounded, Bill noticed the fact that something seemed amiss about him.

In fact the flooring moved.

Acting under the sudden inspiration termed an impulse, he further humped his back.

Thus he became aware of a fact that was rendered doubly interesting by the peculiar circumstances under which he rested.

He had made no mistake.

The flooring, or at least that portion of it immediately above him, did give way.

Sikes remembered one of the reasons why he had humped under the house.

It was to look for some trap which Ferguson might have.

True, at the time he had suspected that if there was such a trap, it might lead to an underground passage.

This was where he made his mistake.

There seemed to be such a trap, but it led simply under the house.

He continued to push upward.

When he found himself rising into the room, he man-

aged to squirm around, and seize hold of the trap ere it fell backward.

Then he drew himself through.

This was a queer combination surely.

He lowered the trap and glanced around.

The fire was burning.

Its light revealed the interior of the place, and he could see his position fairly well.

Where was the door?

Ah! his eyes fell upon it.

He had already taken several steps in that direction, when he heard a voice outside.

It seemed to him that the men were about to enter.

Close at hand was a sort of ladder.

It led to a small loft overhead.

Acting on the spur of the moment the detective sprang to this, and mounted with a rapidity that was amazing.

Once up above, he drew his revolver, and hovered near the opening.

He fully expected to hear the cries of the men below, and be compelled to meet them in a fierce tussel at the top of the ladder, nor did he shrink from the encounter.

To his surprise and satisfaction no such alarm was given—it must be that his presence in the house was not suspected.

With such an advantageous position, Sikes was in one sense a trifle disappointed, because the rush was not made.

He could surely have kept them busily employed while his men, rushing in, might attack them in the rear, and thus complete the demoralization of the outlaws.

Ah! they were talking again.

The sounds traveled along the timbers of the old house, and as his ear was pressed close to the floor, he heard all that passed between Jesse James outside, and his comrade under the house.

Bill smiled at what came to him.

Plainly then he had at least succeeded in eluding his enemies.

They could have no suspicion of his presence within the dwelling of the ferryman.

How was he to get out?

That seemed to be the momentous question agitating his mind now.

A while back it had been just the opposite, and he was wondering how in the world they were ever going to get into the building.

Before he could make up his mind on this point, the men had entered the cabin, and it was rendered impossible.

He had to make the most of a bad bargain, and await the turn of circumstances.

At any rate, should the worst come, he felt that he could hold his own in the loft until the arrival of reinforcements put another phase on the affair.

He kept near the opening.

It was his desire to look down now and then, so that he might observe all that was going on in the lower story.

The men had secured the door.

No light had been struck, but they were gathered in their old places before the fire, which Ferguson poked

until the logs took new life, sending up a ruddy flame that danced over the walls with a bright light, and shone upon the faces of the men.

It was a strange sight.

Bill Sikes would never forget it while he lived.

There sat four desperadoes, for whom the Government of Missouri had offered a reward aggregating many thousands of dollars, while the express companies had done likewise.

The man who could cage them all would be a happy and fortunate fellow.

If he could only think of something by means of which he could put them all to sleep, while he unbarred the door and allowed his men to enter the cabin, how nice it would be.

Such a plan could not be arranged, as he had neither the drug that would perform such a work, nor did the opportunity to use it come up.

He must think of some other scheme, that was more feasible in its working.

If Jesse James should move within range, he would take the chance of shooting him.

This would count one.

The others would spring forward to avenge his death, and thus the situation which he had anticipated would be brought about.

CHAPTER XV.

DOWN THE LADDER.

It was a peculiar situation for a man to find himself in.

As the outlaws kept out of range, Sikes hardly knew how he was going to get the benefit of it.

Would the men attempt to come up into the loft when they thought of going to sleep?

He did not know.

It was an open question.

Another thing began to rise before him: Was there any way in which he could escape from his present strange position, which had been entirely unsought by him?

In other words, was there no opening in this loft by means of which he could reach the open air again if he desired?

After all, he was not so sure that he wanted to leave the loft.

Why should he?

The position was peculiar, no doubt, but it afforded him a scope for his ingenuity in devising a means of capturing the outlaws or bringing about their death.

Just to ease his mind with regard to the subject, he thought he would take a little stroll around his confined quarters.

It might make considerable difference in his plans whether he could escape or not.

So he started out.

As seeing was next to impossible, he had to grope his way around.

His search gave him little satisfaction.

True, he found a window.

It was a narrow slit under the eaves of the house, and a man could not get his head through it, much less his whole body.

Beyond this he discovered nothing in the way of an opening.

There were some old blankets on the floor, indicating that the ferryman slept up in the loft, at times, at least.

Again Sikes returned to his vigil at the opening.

What would his men think?

They must be mystified at his strange disappearance as much as the outlaws—even more so, in fact, for they knew to a certainty that he was under the house at the time Dick Little got ready to crawl forward and investigate.

Sikes was a little nervous.

He hoped they would not go away.

He had warned them against this, and believed they would stick it out.

Gradually the men below began to exhibit signs of sleepiness, and he knew the crisis must soon be coming upon him.

They spoke to Ferguson about it.

He mentioned the loft.

Jesse James declared that, for one, he was bound to hug that fire all night; it was too cheerful a friend to desert, and he meant to stretch out on the floor, if Ferguson could only get him a blanket.

The others said ditto.

Ferguson started toward the ladder.

His intention was evident.

He was coming up after the blanket, and needed no light, being in his own domicile.

For the life of him, Sikes could not remember on which side the blankets lay.

He wanted to keep out of the man's way, and yet had to trust to luck after all.

Crouching low, he awaited the man's coming.

Ferguson brushed past him.

Half a foot more and he must have collided with the man who hid, and then there would have been the deuce to pay.

Fortunately such a disaster did not occur.

Sikes shrank farther away, and when the man dragged the blankets forward to toss them below, he was far enough off to avoid collision.

When Ferguson had thus disposed of all his available assets in the way of blankets, he followed them down the ladder.

Again Bill Sikes was left alone, monarch of all he surveyed—which was little enough, as he could hardly distinguish his hand before his eyes, save directly at the opening.

He kept up his vigil.

The men below selected some covering and began to arrange their rough sleeping-places.

Ferguson prepared to accompany them to the land of dreams, Sikes was glad to see.

He had plenty of wood piled up near the fire, and placed some heavy pieces on the blaze ere seeking his couch, arranging them so that they would be slowly consumed.

One by one the men dropped off.

One man alone acted a little nervously.

This was Ferguson.

Sikes watched him especially.

Could the man have even a slight suspicion that he

limbed up through the trap in the floor, and entered the cabin?

Such a thought may have entered his head, but he said nothing to his companions about it, not wanting to mention the existence of the trap, which was meant for his private use in some case of emergency.

He passed.

A heavy breathing coming from below announced that one of the men slept.

Outside the west wind kept up its howling as the fire swept across the waste of waters.

Sikes was in no hurry.

In fact he contemplated was a daring one, and he made positive that the men below were fast locked in the arms of Morpheus before he ventured to make his trial.

When the stake is life itself, it is astonishing how even the most reckless may become.

It seemed a long time ere the situation assumed the form he desired.

There were five men.

While four slept it generally happened that the remaining man would be awake, perhaps sitting up and rubbing his eyes and yawning.

Several times Bill thought his chance had arrived, only to find over an impediment in the way as he was about to execute his plan into operation.

It exasperated him after a while.

Feeling his impatience, he waited longer, and finally gave up.

His chance had arrived.

He had already silently examined his revolver, and was sure that it was in perfect working order.

He did because he believed his life might depend on the manipulation of this weapon.

He intended passing down the ladder, and going to the sleeping men.

The fire blazed fitfully.

Could one of the men awaken while he was hanging on the ladder, or picking his way to the door—well, it did not require much of a wizard to reckon up the chances.

There would be the rapid detonation of small arms, and death would visit the ferryman's cabin, riding on the wings of the storm.

Wonder he was very particular in looking after small details.

When he made up his mind that the time had come, he once set about moving.

Another minute the detective was clinging to the ladder and descending.

Any one opened his eyes then, he must surely have been discovered, for the fire took a notion to show itself, and blazed cheerily.

After he descended.

There was no alarm.

His foot touched the floor.

The blaze died out, leaving the room in a sort of semi-darkness.

He had to be careful in stepping over toward the door to be certain that he did not tread upon one of the sleepers.

That was what he had hoped for, however. The lack

of light might increase his danger one way, while it gave him more chances in another.

He picked his way along.

There was no chance of missing the door, as he had carefully marked its position in his mind, so that he could have found it in the dark.

It was a positive thrill of excitement that pervaded his being while thus standing in the midst of these desperate men.

It seemed as though some fate had put them temporarily in his power.

His plan of escape from the house was best.

Once with his men, he would find a way to circumvent the desperadoes.

Steadily he advanced.

The door was now near at hand.

He had, he believed, stepped over the last of the sleepers, and had an open space between himself and the means of exit which he coveted.

Success seemed almost positive.

The fire made a poor attempt to blaze up again, but it was a feeble effort.

Just at this critical moment Sikes heard a sound back of him.

He immediately dropped down, and, twisting his head around, saw a man sitting up.

The fellow was between himself and the fire, and seemed to be stretching. Sikes could discover this fact, for the other's figure stood out against the faint light hovering about the hearth.

It was Ferguson.

He had aroused just in time to attend to the feeble fire, but it seemed unfortunate for the success of the detective's plans.

A few minutes more would have placed him absolutely beyond the danger line.

All he could do now was to wait and hope the other might not discover him.

While Ferguson worked at the fire, Sikes kept edging toward the door.

He was close to it.

The bar caught his eye, for as Ferguson had cast some chips upon the fire, it blazed up.

At the worst, he believed he could dash that aside and escape from the place.

Would the ferryman lie down again.

He had finished his work at the fire, and turned to resume his position on the floor.

At this moment he discovered the intruder.

A cry burst from his lips.

Knowing that he was discovered, Sikes could no longer play his game of silence.

He sprang hurriedly to his feet and snatched at the bar across the door.

It gave way before his half-frenzied attack, and he tore the door open.

Even as the outlaws sprang to an upright position, the daring detective dashed through the opening and vanished in the darkness.

CHAPTER XVI.

TO REELFOOT LAKE.

Confusion ensued.

There were shouts, and oaths heaved high above the raging of the wild storm.

The outlaws, aroused from a sound sleep by this sudden alarm, naturally supposed the enemy was upon them.

They were ready to do battle, but at the same time seemed somewhat demoralized.

Ferguson was the only man who understood the exact situation of affairs, and, as his words went to prove it, Jesse James jumped on him.

"What's the row? You gave the alarm!"

"Yes, I did."

"Who opened that door?"

"A man who went out."

"Not one of us?" with a glance around, the fire having picked up enough for him to count noses.

"No, some one else."

"D'ye mean a man, an enemy, has been here among us, Fergy?"

"I reckon it's a fact."

"And you said the door was secure?"

"I say it still."

"Yet he got in."

"Not that way, Jesse, not that way."

"But he went out through the door."

"True as Gospel. I seen him lift the bar."

"See here, Fergy, you know how that critter came to be in this house."

Ferguson knew he must confess.

"I've an idea about it."

"Well, out with it."

"Truth to tell, this critter must be the man as crawled under the house."

"Yes."

"That's a sort of trap in the floor which I meant to keep secret, as some time it would come in handy. I reckon he found that about the occasion of your firin', and climbed up into the house."

"Where has he been all this while?"

Ferguson glanced toward the ladder.

"Up loft, probably."

"I see; all plain sailing. Now shut the door."

"The devil's to pay."

"How's that, Fergy?"

"Why, the critter's carried off the bar."

"Haven't you any other that will do?"

"Not one."

"Then the door can't be fastened?"

"We might devise some means."

Jesse James shook his head.

"Ferguson, you are acquainted around here?"

"With the country?"

"Yes."

"I am pretty well."

"Then lead us to some other shelter. This house of yours is in a poor way."

"You mean it, Jesse James?"

"I do."

"That settles it. When shall we go?"

"At once—this very minute, before that man has a chance to find his friends."

"Do you know him?" asked quiet Frank James.

"I've got strong suspicions."

There was little to do.

The men were already fully dressed and needed but to slap on their hats, when they were ready to pass out into the raging storm.

If they expected to meet with opposition at the door they were mistaken.

The detective had not as yet been able to gather his men together for an attack.

Into the darkness of the night plunged the five men, and the gloomy shadows of the woods lining the Kentucky shore swallowed them up.

Three minutes later Bill Sikes, having found his men by means of a signal whistle, led them up to the ferryman's cabin.

They were determined to carry the war into Africa; to burst in among the desperadoes and have a regular battle of it.

"Ready?" whispered Bill.

"Yes," came the reply.

"The door's ajar," said one of the men.

At this the detective smiled.

"Of course; I carried away the bar. Ready, now, every man, to fire."

"Ready."

"Open the door."

With a sudden movement it was thrown wide open; four men thrust their deadly weapons into the room, but did not fire.

"There was nothing to fire at."

The room seemed vacated.

There was the fire burning cheerily, and throwing a ruddy glow into every part of the apartment, so that a mouse could hardly have remained concealed, and certainly not a man.

Undoubtedly those they sought were not here.

Our friends had nerved themselves for a desperate struggle, and now looked around them in blank amazement.

"Gone!" ejaculated Lige.

"Vamooseed the ranch," muttered Jed.

"Are you sure?" asked the detective.

"Whar else could they be?"

Sikes nodded toward the opening at the top of the ladder.

"I was hidden up yonder; perhaps they may have taken a notion to do the same."

Jed shook his head.

"Tain't likely at all."

"Will you prove it?"

"Yes."

The lanky mountaineer snatched up a blazing brand and climbed up the ladder.

He held the impromptu torch above his head and kept his eyes on the alert.

Those below held their breath for a few seconds as the man passed the flooring above.

Nothing followed.

He waved the torch to and fro.

"All clear up here!" he called out.

"That settles it; they've gone."

Jed dropped down again.

A council of war was next in order to decide what their future course should be.

All seemed of one mind.

The game had given them the slip for the time being, and could not be followed farther while this darkness lasted.

Under the circumstances they might just as well make themselves comfortable, and wait until morning came.

They had some suspicions with regard to where the fugitives might be found; one suggested this idea, another that, and gradually the whole fabric was woven.

At least there was solid comfort here.

The detective found the bar for the door and secured the only means of entrance, save the trap underneath the house.

The warmth of the fire was very comfortable to the three men who had been so long out in the cold, and they hovered over the cheery blaze as though determined to make the most of it.

Sikes had not kept his long vigil for nothing.

He went into the lone ferryman's pantry and brought out food.

Soon the savory odor of fried onions again arose on the air, while a steamer of coffee added its fragrance to the distress of the hungry men's olfactories, driving them almost wild ere the chief cook announced things ready.

There, at midnight, the four men-hunters sat down to a rude but palatable meal in the cabin of the ferryman.

They were not a merry party, perhaps, but on no brow did gloom rest.

It is natural for men to feel cheerful when enjoying a good meal, and the change from the dreary vigil outside to the warm cabin was so great that the party would have been made of queer material, indeed, had they not shown a decided alteration of spirits.

Here they made themselves as comfortable as the law allowed until morning.

Knowing the nature of the men he had to deal with, the detective would not allow all to sleep at the same time.

One must remain on guard.

This principle was carried out, and the gray dawn found them in the humor for another meal, which was soon made ready.

Sikes was thinking.

He wondered whether the desperadoes would return to the ferryman's house.

There was no other way for them to cross the Mississippi for miles in either direction.

The wind still blew hard, but was gradually growing less, and a peculiarity of such a storm lies in the fact that the waves cease as soon as the wind comes to a stop.

Yes, it was possible that they might return, if satisfied that they had led their foes a wild-goose chase.

The detective was shrewd.

He did not mean to be outwitted so easily.

Calling Jed to go with him, he walked down to the skiff that was drawn up on the little beach, beyond the reach of the hungry waves.

"Help me launch this?"

"Thunder! you don't mean to go across!" ejaculated the old sharpshooter, eying the great body of tumbling water with apprehension.

"Wait, and you'll see."

He said no more.

Jed had come to understand that this man was a master, and he obeyed his directions without another word or a murmur.

Undoubtedly the detective had an idea in view, and was desirous of putting it into execution.

They launched the skiff, and Jed took the oars.

"What now?" he asked, as he held the boat bow on, against the waves.

"Put me up alongside the scow."

"Good."

Jed wondered still what was in the wind, but he obeyed the order.

In another minute the skiff came alongside the larger boat.

"Get aboard?" said Jed.

The detective laughed.

"You may if you want a free but rough ride," he said, leaning forward to lay hold of the larger vessel's gunwale, and drag the skiff up toward her bow.

"I'll stick by you, colonel."

"Very good."

Sikes had drawn a knife.

When he reached the bow, the detective leaned over and drew the sharp blade across the anchor-rope of the scow.

As this was held taut, it parted instantly, and the old flatboat began to move down stream.

"To the beach again, Jed."

The wind was rapidly drawing from west to north, and the waves did not beat upon the shore with such violence.

"Away she goes," said Sikes, chuckling as he stood on the beach, and watched the old craft go plunging down the noble stream.

"She won't come ashore?"

"Not the way the wind holds now."

"Well."

"Take the oars out of the skiff; throw them one at a time far out on the river. Now follow with the boat—that's it, a good push, Jed."

The skiff started after the flatboat.

There was nothing remaining for the ferryman in case he came back—at least, so far as getting over the river was concerned.

"That settles it."

"I reckon it does, colonel."

"If they come here, they'll find no means of getting across. We have effectually put an end to such a possibility," said Bill.

They were now ready to take up the trail.

It would lead them to a singular region, unless their guess was wide of the mark.

Ferguson had some years before been a guide on Reelfoot Lake, a singular body of water down in Tennessee, just across from the Kentucky line.

Years ago a section of country fell in—caved some ten feet or more, as though the bottom had fallen out of it.

This tract occupied hundreds of acres.

The water of the Mississippi found its way into the great sink and formed a lake—probably the most peculiar in the country—a forest under ten feet of water.

In time these trees have died, and present a weird aspect, but for duck-shooting and bass-fishing Reelfoot Lake has no superior in the Middle States.

It was to this mysterious region they believed the desperadoes had fled.

CHAPTER XVII.

BESIEGED IN CASTLE JACK.

Four men came upon Reelfoot Lake an hour or so after sunset.

Making their progress with some difficulty along the edge of the sink, in half an hour they came in sight of a small house.

It seemed to be on the road.

"There is the place I spoke about, sir."

"Johnson's?"

"Yes, sir. He has guides to hire out, boats at the landing—in fact, the sportsmen can come here and get a complete outfit from Jack Johnson at such a price a day—gun, ammunition, clothes, boat, guide, and lodging."

The detective smiled.

"Quite accommodating place, this. And you think, Jed, that if those men have arrived——"

The detective's sentence was never finished, for, at that instant, shots were heard in the direction of the retreat. The whole party shared in the excitement, and well they might do so.

When they expected silence ahead, this sudden confusion boded no good.

"Sounds like a fight," declared Abe.

The shots and shouts continued.

"If so, those fellows are in it. Do you suppose they would attempt to clean out the duck-shooters who happened to be there?"

Jed snorted his disbelief.

"They ain't after such small game. When Frank and Jesse James get down to work, it means big business. I never heard of their stoopin' to anything below an express car or a bank."

"Just so—I believe you; but how can we explain this strange affair?"

"I reckon I can give a guess."

"Do so, then."

"The sheriff over here in this corner of Tennessee is a mighty spry chap, and don't take no dare from a living man.

"It's jist possible that he's had word to the effect that the James boys has crossed into this section.

"Perhaps he takes it as a big dare, and has collected a posse with the intention of arrestin' 'em."

Sikes ground some choice words between his teeth.

"I wouldn't be surprised if you were right, Jed. If so, it breaks our little game all up."

"That's a fact, governor," returned the philosophical Jed, who took matters as they came, and generally appeared to care little whether school kept or not.

"Confusion take the sheriff."

"Wait. We don't know yet whether this is so, but I seem to have an idee that way."

"It may turn out otherwise."

"And only be a little brawl over yonder."

"I sincerely hope so, for the sake of our plans, and in the interest of humanity."

As they set about advancing once more, the noise broke out again louder than ever.

The detective could think of no other cause for the awful clamor than the one which his guide had suggested—that an attempt was being made—reckless as it was—to arrest the James boys, and the sheriff's posse had met with a sudden and desperate resistance.

This was very probably the case.

It ruined all of their plans of campaign.

After this explosion, there was no use in attempting to steal a march upon their intended victims. The alarm was given and from this time on the outlaws would be on the watch.

They drew nearer.

The lights did not diminish, but the shots had ceased, perhaps only temporarily.

Sikes revolved the matter in his mind.

One thing was plain. They would have to join forces with the Tennessee sheriff, if the case should prove to be as Jed prophesied.

That was the only alternative.

Their mission must be fulfilled, if it lay in mortal power to do it, no matter whether it took twenty men or two for the work.

Closer still.

They could now hear men talking excitedly.

No one noticed their approach.

Then some one discovered them and called out.

There was a rush of feet.

A dozen men, heavily armed, approached them.

"Who are you?"

Bill Sikes faced the speaker.

He was a wiry-looking individual, full of snap and determination.

"Who are you?" he asked in turn.

"Andrew Baird, sheriff of this county, and in the act of arresting the whole James gang of Missouri outlaws, who have crossed the line into my jurisdiction."

The detective put out his hand.

"I like your style, Sheriff Baird, and offer the services of myself and men for the laudable purpose you have in view."

"Very good, friend, but who are you?"

Sikes explained.

What he said made the sheriff very glad to have such a decided acquisition to his posse.

He rubbed his hands together in a way suggestive of self-congratulation.

"We'll get 'em yet, sir, we'll get 'em, or at least give Jesse James the biggest pull he ever had in all his life," he said, in his quick, nervous way.

"Yes, but where are they, man?"

The sheriff pointed to the house.

"Yonder, cooped up like sheep held for the slaughter. We'll have 'em yet if we have to burn Jack's place down. The State will pay him, and if not, by Jove, I will, out of the rewards."

"But what if you burn the house and the men escape? What will Jack say?"

"He has already decided that I have the right to do as I wish, eh, Jack?"

Johnson was near by.

He gave a forced laugh.

"I happen to know when necessity compels a man, and under the present circumstances I am unable to help myself. Do your sweet will, sheriff, and I'll collect full damages."

Sikes was anxious to know how the campaign had been conducted, and questioned the sheriff until he learned it all.

As soon as Sheriff Baird received word that the desperate James boys had come into his district, he hastily organized a posse, and gathering men as he proceeded, advanced upon the place where they were reported to be quartered.

Some unfortunate accident revealed the presence of the posse just after they had the house surrounded, and shots were fired from the windows.

One by one the inmates of the house fled from its shelter to the ranks of the sheriff's posse.

It was believed that the outlaws were the only inmates left in the house, and they seemed ready to hold the fort. Abe mentioned his little bomb.

The sheriff seemed taken with the idea, and a number of times handled the deadly affair in a reflective manner, as though he began to see how it could be utilized.

There was a kitchen connected with the building, and if this could be demolished they would have no trouble in finding a way of entering the main part of the house over the *débris*.

Upon counting all his available force, the doughty little sheriff found that he had just twenty-three men on hand.

This seemed a sufficient number to accomplish the object they had in view, but when the nature of the men whom they sought to overcome was taken in consideration, it was none too large.

A scout was sent forward to reconnoiter.

He was fired upon and barely escaped with his life—indeed, only the darkness beyond the lights saved him.

This man reported that the inmates of Castle Jack—as the proprietor called his place—had barricaded doors and windows, and were evidently determined to make a firm resistance.

The place could be carried by storm, but it would be with heavy loss.

Sheriff Baird meant to use the bomb.

Arranging his men so as to completely hem in the house, he bade them keep fires going, in order to give the outlaws no chance of escape.

As for himself he assumed the most dangerous task of all, not wishing to assign it to any one else.

This was the placing of the bomb.

Taking advantage of shadow and the trees, the Tennessee sheriff crept up to the rear of the house.

Underneath the floor he had placed the little bomb, and pinched the fuse to five inches, remembering the directions given by Abe.

That meant as many minutes.

He had no trouble in striking a match and applying the fire, as the wind did not blow here.

Having seen the fuse lighted, he had no desire to remain longer in that neighborhood, and hence crawled away as fast as he could.

A double danger menaced him; to remain meant death by means of the bomb, while should he expose himself one of the outlaws would pick him off.

The sheriff managed to balance matters and escape both.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CASTLE ABLAZE.

"Where have you been?" asked the detective, when the Tennessee sheriff appeared once more at his side.

"Listen, and you will soon learn," returned the other, with a laugh.

Remembering where he had last seen the little bomb, Sikes understood.

"I should not have done it, but you are responsible only to yourself," he said.

"They were in the main part of the house at the time. If the devil tempts them to come into the kitchen it is at their own risk. Those men have washed their hands in brave blood more than once, and I'm not over particular how I rid the world of them, if I can only do it effectually."

"I suppose there is solid reason in that, and I'm a fool to think otherwise."

"The time must be nearly up."

They listened.

Silence had fallen on the scene.

The sheriff's posse kept the fires going, but not a shot was fired on either side. The besieged did not care to kill the enemy unless an attack was made, while the men of law could see no one to shoot at.

Perhaps half a minute elapsed after the last words spoken by the sheriff.

Then came the explosion.

It was quick and tremendous.

A blinding flash, a thunderous crash, and the remains of the kitchen belonging to Castle Jack were distributed impartially over half an acre.

Shouts of alarm followed.

These were not confined to the house, for some of the sheriff's men were struck with descending *débris*, and many had narrow escapes.

Enough of his men had received warning with respect to what was about to happen, to form a storming party now.

With cheers, and, led by the valiant sheriff in person, they advanced to the attack.

Shots greeted their advance.

They were wise enough not to form a compact band, but each man advanced upon his own individual route, dodging this way, and taking advantage of every obstacle that would serve as a hiding-place in the forward movement.

Thus quite a number of them reached the place where the kitchen had been.

It had entirely disappeared.

The bomb had done its work.

If any one had been inside at the time, escape was entirely out of the question.

That the enemy was on the alert, and not disconcerted by the sudden explosion, they soon had positive evidence. Shots had greeted their advance, and, at close range those became more effective.

More than one man was wounded.

A desperate assault being made on the door, it was

only to discover that this was barricaded since the explosion by those within.

In vain the heavy men of the sheriff's force hurled their weight against it.

Having no ax to break the door in with, the party found their work more difficult than they had calculated upon.

All the while those within kept up a galling fire, and while none of the assailants had thus far been killed, a number received wounds.

Besides, it was demoralizing to have their foes thus make targets out of them, with no chance of returning the compliment.

He finally fell back.

The explosion had failed to accomplish its purpose, in that they did not succeed in effecting an entrance to the main part of Castle Jack.

Hence, the outlaws were still in position to bid them defiance, as they held the fort.

The sheriff was more grimly determined than ever that he would bring them to terms.

He gave orders to his men.

"Fire the house!"

The cry ran along the line.

"Ten dollars to the man who first gets a torch under the floor!" cried the sheriff.

This incentive was hardly needed, since almost every man was ready to assist; the sting of first defeat goaded them on, and they swore under their breath to snatch victory from the game.

A dozen went forward at once.

It was a peculiar sight to see them dodging about from one point of advantage to another, each individual believing he was the center of attraction on the part of the besieged, and every gun aimed in his particular quarter.

Some carried blazing torches.

These made them attractive marks for the rifles of the desperadoes, but strange to say the latter did not fire upon them as they advanced.

Perhaps they were reserving their ammunition for a more desperate moment.

Others who crept up carried matches and firewood that they meant to kindle.

Taken in all it looked as though Castle Jack was certainly doomed.

The sheriff was here, there, and everywhere.

In his nervous way he directed his posse to shoot to kill, and not waste time endeavoring to wing such men, who would not hesitate to put a bullet into a fatal quarter about their anatomy, in case the occasion presented itself.

Who was the first to fire the house?

That was a question that admitted of some debate, as there were a number who claimed the honor.

"Job Smith's fire!" called one.

"I claim that ere ten!" sang out another.

"Count Joe Connor in the game."

Three fires had sprung into existence almost simultaneously, and the sheriff rubbed his eyes in perplexity as he saw them.

"Bless my soul, I can't decide who was first. I'll either have to divide the first money or make three tens out of it. The boys have outdone themselves."

They certainly had lost no time in obeying the orders given them by their chief.

Once the fires obtained a start, everything seemed to be in favor of a good blaze.

The house was fairly dry, and enough wind stirred over the weird lake to fan the flames into their most furious condition.

Having accomplished their purpose, the men who had set fire to the building fell back.

They had other work to do now.

Presently the heat would be so intense that no living being could remain inside the burning castle, consequently the outlaws must make a dash for life.

In order to meet them on the square, Sheriff Baird had massed his men in two squads.

The appearance of the desperadoes was to be the signal for a terrible volley.

When this torrent of lead rushed into their midst, the unfortunate devils must go down like wheat before the scythes of the reaper.

They waited, at first patiently, but after a time with considerable uneasiness.

Were the outlaws salamanders?

The heat must be something terrible inside the house, and yet no one appeared.

Would those men of evil repute prefer to remain there to be roasted to death, rather than rush out and meet the foe face to face?

It did not seem possible.

One way they had a show, small though it might be, while on the other hand, the fire granted no chance of mercy.

At any rate, their endurance was something superb.

More than one exclamation arose from the men encircling the burning house, to the effect that they had never seen such bravado.

If they did not know it to be an actual fact, they would never suspect that human beings could be in the blazing house.

The detective alone entertained doubts.

He shook his head uneasily.

"Human flesh and blood couldn't stand that roasting, sheriff," he said to the other.

"Do you think so, really?"

"I'll swear to it."

"But what could have happened to them?"

"They may be secreted in some den underneath the castle."

"Jack assures me there is no such place."

"Then they have escaped."

"Impossible."

"I confess I can't explain the *modus operandi*, but I know those men, and if present they would have faced ten times as many foes as are here."

"It is very mysterious."

"Another thing note—when our men went forward with torches to fire the house, their intention was plain enough."

"Yes."

"And yet not a shot was fired at them."

"That is true."

"Does it stand to reason that the James boys would be

so paralyzed with fear as to be unable to raise a hand in their defense?"

"I would have hard work to believe it."

"And I can't gulp it down. No, sir; there's something wrong about this business. I imagine our birds have given us the slip."

"Well, suppose they have left the house, this place is a genuine little island, so that they will find themselves unable to leave it without boats."

"Very true, unless they swim."

"Which they will not do."

"How about the boats?"

"They are close by, under charge of a man."

"Suppose we step over to them."

"You are very suspicious."

"I have a right to be, for I know our man full well, and understand what a tricky subject he is."

"Well, come along."

The sheriff was himself growing suspicious; somehow the disease was catching, although he did not have it as strongly as his companion.

Together they strode toward the shore.

The water was hardly a stone's throw from the house, and when a score of steps had been taken they found themselves on the spot.

"Here's where I left Ben Logan."

"Where is he now?"

"I'm afraid the excitement has been too much, and Ben has joined the other boys."

At this moment Sikes stumbled over something.

A groan arose.

"I believe you are wrong, sheriff. Lean over and see if this is not your man."

Sure enough the guard lay there with blood upon his face from the effects of a blow received.

"Ben—Logan, what does this mean?" demanded Baird, eagerly.

The man groaned again.

"They've done for me, I reckon, sheriff."

"Nonsense! You're worth a dozen dead men. Tell me, what became of them?"

"The big boat, sheriff; gone up the lake. Listen, they ain't far away," said the stricken guard.

They bent their heads, and in the light of the fire saw the boat containing Jesse James and his gang creeping along near the shore.

CHAPTER XIX.

CONCLUSION.

How it had been done no one could say; nor was this the time for studying such a question.

The fact stood out before them. In some way their cunning enemies had slipped from the castle; probably just after the attack following the blowing up of the kitchen had proved a failure.

Sheriff Baird was alive to the occasion.

He did not call out at the top of his voice that his enemy was escaping, and thus create confusion.

Such a course would have alarmed the retreating outlaws, and caused them to put more vim in their strokes.

Quietly the sheriff passed the word along, and a dozen men responded to his call at once.

Johnson, hearing what was up, made his appearance,

carrying something in his hand that might have been a heavy eight-bore double-barreled ducking gun.

The men filled three of the smaller boats.

Their oars dropped into the water, and away they shot in pursuit of the enemy.

Although several minutes had elapsed since the discovery of the big boat, it was not yet entirely out of sight.

Being near the limit of light radiating from the fire it must soon have ceased to be seen from that point.

Quickly the fugitives discovered that they were being pursued.

This was shown in the increased rapidity of their movements.

The sheriff sat in the stern of one boat.

Within a dozen feet was a second, with Sikes in the stern and Johnson in the bow.

"One thing worries me," said Baird.

"What is that, sheriff?"

"They must soon pass beyond the range of the fire-light; even now we see them indistinctly."

"True."

"Then the darkness will swallow them up. We shall lose them, for this thing of trying to locate and follow a sound is all bosh."

The detective spoke mournfully.

He hated to lose his game.

"Perhaps not," said a voice.

"Ah! you there, Johnson?"

"Yes—watch."

A bright light suddenly flashed out ahead; along the path of it they could just manage to see the big boat of the enemy.

This gleam came from a headlight or reflecting lantern that was fastened in the bow of the boat occupied by Johnson, Sikes, and four other men.

Finding that all their efforts to overtake the fleeing outlaws seemed to be useless, the sheriff and Sikes crept to the bows of their respective crafts and began opening upon the fugitives.

Rifles were used.

On account of the strange, uncertain light, and the movement of the boats, these shots were not apt to prove very dangerous.

One lucky shot seemed to create something of excitement in the boat ahead, and it looked as though damage had been done.

The boat lost but little headway, and was soon booming along at the same pace.

This could not keep up much longer, nor did Ferguson intend it should.

They had now drawn near the other shore, where a dismal stretch of swamp came down to the shore of the lake.

Few had ever penetrated this labyrinth.

Ferguson knew its depths better than any living man, perhaps.

He depended upon this knowledge now to get his party out of the scrape.

At last they struck land.

This was just what the ferryman of the Mississippi had been looking for.

Immediately the boat was cleared.

One of the men was wounded and had to receive a

little assistance from the others; but he managed to get along.

All of them vanished from view.

Up came the other boats.

They were hardly two minutes behind.

When the men jumped out they found no sign of life about them.

There was the boat, partly drawn up, and in it quite a puddle of blood.

Around them lay the weird swamp, with its wild fowls, its owls and snake homes; but the outlaws of Missouri had vanished.

The headlight was hastily detached.

With this to serve them as a light they began to pick up the trail.

The stains of blood gave them more chances than anything else.

After a little even this ceased, and they saw signs that went to show how the man's wound had been bound up by a comrade.

The manner in which those men crept through the swamp was wonderful.

A passage had been used that led under the thick growth at times, so that they were actually compelled to fall on their hands and knees in following it.

With dogged persistence they kept it up, although with slight hopes of success.

Having the light was an advantage, and they made better time than they suspected.

At any rate they drew up on the fugitives.

This the detective guessed, for he heard sounds ahead that warned him of it—the whirl of wings as some wild fowl was disturbed by the advance of the men close to the pool where it rested.

They soon had positive evidence of this fact.

There was a sudden rifle shot.

Then came a jingle of glass.

Darkness fell upon them.

"Confusion," ejaculated Sikes.

"The devil has ruined our lantern," said Baird.

"And ended the hunt."

That ended it all.

They heard a distant laugh ahead, and knew it was Jesse James who had fired that shot.

The sheriff's party began to back out.

The lantern was not in itself demolished, only the glass and reflector gone.

Lighting it up again they managed to get enough illumination to show them the trail they had so lately made.

All were weary when the boats were reached, and the voyage back entered upon.

The sheriff realized that he had taken a load upon his shoulders.

Here Castle Jack was burned down, and he would be held responsible for its loss.

He had expected to pay for it out of the great rewards promised for the apprehension of the James boys, but since these worthies had managed to slip through his fingers he must look elsewhere for the ducats.

As for the detective, he too, had reason to feel disappointed.

The castle still burned.

Enough light came across the waste of water to serve them as a guide.

They rowed sadly back.

Talking over the situation, it was determined to start in fresh when morning came.

The James boys had better make across the great river without further delay, unless they defied the power of fate.

Morning came.

A great hue and cry was raised.

Fully five-score of men joined in the chase, and when the trail was finally found they opened on it like a pack of fox-hounds.

All seemed hot for the game.

During the entire morning they kept up the pursuit and at noon drew near the river.

Here they expected to find their men waiting for some means of crossing.

They moved forward in a body.

At last they broke cover.

The broad Mississippi lay before them.

Vainly they looked along the bank for some sign of the men they were after.

A cry arose.

"Beaten again, by the gods!" shouted Baird—"look out on the water."

All eyes were immediately turned thither.

About a third of the way across the rolling flood, a small boat propelled by a pair of oars, danced up and down on the waves created by the north wind.

Five persons occupied it.

They were readily recognized, and if any doubt as to their identity remained it was dissipated when a shout of derision came floating over the water.

A volley was fired.

The bullets fell all around the boat, but no one seemed to be injured.

Soon they were beyond range.

Having no means of pursuing, the Tennessee sheriff and his posse found themselves compelled to stand there and watch.

They saw the outlaws land on Missouri soil, and then lost sight of them.

After that the posse separated.

Jed, Lige and Abe returned to their Kentucky homes, their wrongs of the past unavenged, whatever they might chance to be.

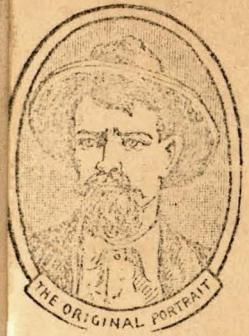
As for Bill Sikes, he realized more than ever what a herculean task lay before any one who devoted his time to hunting down the James boys.

If they could not be captured in Kentucky where they had few friends, the task was certainly a more desperate one over in Missouri, where they had many warm admirers, sympathizers with the Southern cause, now known as the Lost Cause.

THE END.

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